THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

chamber music for strings

Mozart Clarinet Quintet

Paul Stanhope *Morning Star*, for string quartet

Rimsky–Korsakov *Allegro* and *Variations*

Beethoven String Quintet in C major

2.30 pm, Sunday 4 December 2005

St. Stephen's Church, Newtown

When at the end of 2000 a new string orchestra was formed and a concert planned for February 2001, it was only meant as a one–off. There was no intention that five years and fifteen programmes later, the Bourbaki Ensemble would still be around. But that concert, featuring music by Sculthorpe, Debussy, Mahler and Dvořák, was so successful that we put on another in August, and the rest is (some kind of) history...

After five years there are many people to thank. Principally Peter Rodgers and his predecessor Raymond Heslehurst, for allowing us to perform in the glorious atmosphere of St. Stephen's Church; also Kerry Klujin and Diana Cucvara who have organised our concerts at Macquarie University, and Camille Merčep for inviting us to play at the Garrison Church in The Rocks. At most of our performances Lyn Turnbull and Lorraine Woods have been there at the door to welcome our audiences, and Fran Morris has often generously shared her local expertise in leading post–concert tours of St. Stephen's historic cemetery.

Then there are the performers. Some have played in the orchestra many times, some only once: we thank them all. We have been very fortunate in having had the opportunity to play with many talented soloists. For the record, there have been performers on flute, clarinet, recorder and horn, six violins (four of them simultaneously) and a viola, a soprano and a tenor, two guitarists and a harpist.

And thanks too to our audiences. There are a number of you who have been to nearly every concert we have given: it's immensely encouraging to see our "regulars", and really makes us feel that all the hard work is worthwhile.

So, welcome to the final concert in the Bourbaki Ensemble's fifth season! We hope that you will enjoy our programme of classical, romantic and contemporary chamber music, and that you will be with us for the next five years.

PROGRAMME

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Quintet in A major for clarinet and string quartet, K 581

I	Allegro	III	Menuetto
II	Larghetto	IV	Allegretto con variazioni

Duncan Hughes, clarinet; Richard Willgoss, Emlyn Lewis–Jones, violins; Paul Hoskinson, viola; Ian Macourt, cello

Paul Stanhope

Morning Star, for string quartet

I	Moderato, rubato	III	Presto
II	Molto allegro		

Justin White, Kathryn Topp, violins; David Angell, viola; Steve Meyer, cello

INTERVAL — 20 minutes

Nikolai Andreyevich Rimsky–Korsakov

Allegro in B♭ major, and *Variations on a Chorale*

Opus Four String Quartet: Paul Pokorny, Emlyn Lewis–Jones, violins; Julia Pokorny, viola; Wendy Burge, cello

Ludwig van Beethoven

String Quintet in C major, Op. 29

I	Allegro moderato	III	Scherzo: Allegro
II	Adagio molto espressivo	IV	Presto

Heloise Pyne, Justin White, violins; Natalie Adby, David Angell, violas; Steve Meyer, cello

"She ran the whole gamut of emotions from A to B," said Dorothy Parker of a second–rate actress. One might say of a composer, without conveying the least unfavourable imputation, that he ran the whole gamut of emotions from A major to G minor. For the great composers of the classical and baroque periods had a keen sense of the expressive characteristics of different tonalities: "Beethoven in C minor" is a phrase virtually synonymous with dramatic struggle, and the same composer described B minor as "black". Haydn frequently marked some festive occasion by a symphony in C major, incorporating high–pitched horns together with trumpets and timpani; Bach generally employed D major for similar purposes. Perhaps the most acute sensitivity of all to choice of key is found in the works of **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** (1756–1791). The G minor of the Symphony No. 40 and of the String Quintet K 516 brings with it an atmosphere which ranges from melancholy resignation to an almost hysterical desperation, while the solemnity of *The Magic Flute* and the Sinfonia Concertante for Violin, Viola and Orchestra is enhanced by their prevailing E♭ major tonality. In Mozart's work, the very antipode of G minor is found in A major. Mozart's compositions in this key, with scarcely an exception warm and lyrical, include the Clarinet Concerto, Symphony No. 29, Piano Concerto No. 23 and, opening today's concert, the Clarinet Quintet.

Towards the end of his life Mozart became increasingly enamoured of the clarinet, together with its relatives the basset horn and the basset clarinet, and he used these instruments extensively in symphonic, choral and chamber music. At this date the clarinet was still far from being a regular member of the orchestra, but two were included on the strength of the innovative Mannheim orchestra. It was after hearing a performance by this celebrated ensemble in 1788 that Mozart wrote to his father, "If only we had clarinets; you cannot imagine the majestic effect of a symphony with flutes, oboes and clarinets".

Mozart composed his Clarinet Quintet in response to the virtuoso playing of Anton Stadler. (A generous reaction, perhaps, since Stadler had accomplished the remarkable feat of actually borrowing money from the penniless composer.) The first movement begins with a converging sequence of chords in the quartet and a rising and falling arpeggio figure for the the clarinet; both motives will assume great importance as the movement unfolds. The *allegro* is also remarkable for achieving an unparalled depth of expression within the constraints of a textbook, one might almost say a rigid, sonata form.

Undulating strings, muted, accompany the clarinet in the exquisitely poised theme which opens the *Larghetto*. As the clarinet theme ends the first violin introduces another, and the remainder of the movement revolves around these two instruments, each alternately presenting its own themes and adding gentle decorations to the other's. The third movement is a minuet with two trios, the first for strings alone in the only extended minor-key episode of the whole quintet, and the second a lightly accompanied clarinet solo having something of the nature of a *Ländler*. As is customary, each trio is followed by a reprise of the minuet. The finale is a set of variations on a sixteen–bar theme in two repeated halves. The first three variations give leading roles respectively to clarinet, first violin and viola (another brief A minor section). After the fourth, featuring brilliant scales and arpeggios in clarinet and violin, a held note introduces the fifth variation in a surprising drop to an *adagio* tempo. Once this is done with, a return to the initial tempo initiates the coda. A dotted figure from near the start of the main theme dominates the quintet's closing bars.

Australian composer **Paul Stanhope** (born 1969) studied with Peter Sculthorpe at the University of Sydney, and at the Guildhall School of Music. He has achieved a reputation not only as one of the leading young composers in Australia but also internationally, his works having been performed in Europe, Japan and the United States. In 2004 he was awarded the prestigious Tōru Takemitsu Composition Prize for his orchestral score *Fantasia on a Theme by Vaughan Williams*. Other orchestral works in Paul's catalogue include *Groundswell* for symphony orchestra and *Kraftwerk Overture* for strings; he has also written chamber music and choral works. In 2006 Paul will take up the position of artistic director with the Sydney Chamber Choir, having already conducted the choir in numerous performances and in a recording of his own composition *Geography Songs*, to texts by Michael Dransfield.

Morning Star, for string quartet or string orchestra, was written in 1992. The title is that of a melody from central Arnhem Land (*Mularra* in the local language) which is the basis for each of the three short movements. In the first, the melody is treated slowly and flexibly: beginning with the cello, each of the four instruments introduces the theme before giving way to the next and continuing with an unobtrusive accompaniment. Quietly plangent harmonies lend the music a certain edge and prevent it from becoming overly restful. In the subsequent *molto allegro*, the two violins extract miniature phrases from the theme and fit them together in animated patterns above rhythmically elastic and melodically static lines on viola and cello. As the movement proceeds the composer introduces new textures and increasingly complex cross–rhythms, before returning to the fragmented motives of the beginning. The final section is mostly written in a rhythm of seven quavers to the bar, but with irregular insertions of two, four, six or nine beats – presumably in order to keep the performers honest! After a few bars of stringent syncopation in which the cello is pitted against the other three instruments, a final *fortississimo* unison brings the piece to a tumultuous close.

Much of the nationalist fervour in Russian music of the nineteenth century collected around the group of composers known as "The Five". Though united in their purpose of developing Russian music, there were certain differences in the approach they took to achieving their aims. Borodin often emphasized Eastern influences on Russian culture (the spectacular *Polovtsian Dances* from his opera *Prince Igor*, and the tone poem *In the Steppes of Central Asia*) and Mussorgsky had recourse to a starkly realistic evocation of Russian history in *Boris Godunov* and *Khovanshchina*, while the youngest of the five, **Nikolai Andreyevich Rimsky–Korsakov** (1844–1908) found frequent inspiration in the world of Russian folk tales. His operas *Snegurochka* (The Snow Maiden) and *Zolotoi Petushok* (The Golden Cockerel), among others, draw on native sources; an exotic influence of a kindred nature is heard in his ever–popular orchestral fantasy *Scheherezade*.

Rimsky–Korsakov's youth was spent serving in the Russian Navy, and so he may be said, like the other members of "The Five", to have begun his musical life as an amateur. Unlike the others, however, he fairly soon turned professional, when at the age of twenty seven, much to his own astonishment, he was appointed to the post of Professor of Composition at the St. Petersburg Conservatoire. Not surprisingly he decided that the responsibilities of the position obliged him to undertake formal studies in harmony and counterpoint, which heretofore had been a matter of intuition rather than of learning for the young composer. This curtailed his career at sea (though he did not resign from the navy, being commissioned a couple of years later as inspector of military bands); the remainder of his life was devoted to composition and performance, as well as to teaching. Today the St. Petersburg Conservatoire bears his name.

The most popular of Rimsky–Korsakov's works all belong to the operatic and orchestral repertoire, his smaller–scale compositions being much more rarely heard. He and others composed chamber music for performance at the home of Mitrofan Petrovich Beliayev, who was not only a prosperous merchant and an enterprising music publisher but also a keen viola player and chamber musician. These pieces began as surprise gifts for the host's name–day, but later on were written for Beliayev's regular Friday evening sessions, which became very popular from around 1883–1884. Besides Rimsky–Korsakov, these evenings also attracted such participants as Glazunov, Borodin, Liadov and Deutsch, with Beliayev himself taking the viola part in string quartets. The *Allegro* in B♭ major (1899) comes from the second notebook of the "Fridays" collection of string quartets, which was published by Beliaiev in 1899. The original manuscript is lost.

The *Four Variations on a Chorale* were written in St Petersburg in 1884, possibly as educational material for the students of the Court Singing Chapel, and would also have been adapted for symphony orchestra. After the theme is stated, there are four variations: Variation I, *moderato assai*, is a duet for second violin and viola, and Variation II, *andante*, is a trio, omitting the second violin. The work is completed by two further variations marked *con moto* and *allegretto*.

Notes on Rimsky–Korsakov's chamber music by Paul Pokorny.

Arguably the greatest cumulative achievement by any composer in the field of chamber music is the cycle of string quartets by **Ludwig van Beethoven** (1770–1827). Beethoven's sixteen quartets (or seventeen, or eighteen, depending what you count) are without doubt the Everest towards which any quartet wishing to be taken seriously must strive. His other chamber music for strings is relatively little known: there are a handful of trios for violin, viola and cello, all of them very early works, and the duo "With Two Eyeglasses Obbligato" for viola and cello, which, it must be admitted, holds a place in the repertoire only by virtue of the paucity of music for this pairing.

Beethoven's compositions also include four string quintets for two violins, two violas and cello. One of these is an arrangement of a piano trio; another, conversely, is an original work later rescored for piano trio. A third, catalogued as Op. 137, was left incomplete at Beethoven's death, and consists of just a single movement. The pick of the bunch is the Quintet in C major, Op. 29, a masterpiece whose neglect can be explained only by the difficulty, compared with a quartet, of finding one extra player to form a permanent quintet. Beethoven uses the additional instrument sometimes, as one might expect, to obtain a greater weight of sound, a greater depth of tone; but equally often he takes the opportunity to expand the range of textures employed in the work. To give just two examples, the beginning of the first movement is scored largely for just one violin, one viola and cello, while its second subject is initially given to the two violins and first viola.

Despite its modest scoring, the first paragraph of the quintet conveys an impression of grandeur and spaciousness: in the words of Basil Lam, "no earlier Beethoven work has such a broad, even majestic, opening". A transitional passage, beginning with a triplet figure, leads into the shapely and melodic second subject. There is a repeat of the exposition, and a development section largely based on the opening theme and the triplet figure.

The beautiful and ornate theme with which the *adagio molto espressivo* begins is given to the first violin, supported by a richly–textured accompaniment in the lower parts. A contrasting episode features drum–like rhythms and dotted figures; both sections are recapitulated, imaginatively rescored, before the movement ends. Beethoven's far–reaching sense of timing is such that he feels no need to hurry through the silences of the last few bars. The third movement is a *scherzo* with scarcely any identifiable melody, the thematic material consisting purely of a leaping three–note figure which dances in and out of all five parts. The first viola introduces the trio with a more extended and tuneful arpeggio theme, while in a darker section the second viola grimly holds to its own rhythm against the *unison* of the other four instruments.

The *presto* finale pits abrupt figures in the first violin (and later cello) against a measured *tremolo* background. The effect has been compared with the fourth movement of the "Pastoral" Symphony, and has earned the quintet the nickname "Der Sturm" in German–speaking countries. The opening is repeated and soon succeeded by an extraordinary passage in which three irreconcilable rhythms are set against each other. After a pause, the music resumes with an inconsequential tune (actually from an unpublished song of Beethoven's) over a trite accompaniment. This section is marked *andante con moto e scherzoso*, and is surely a deliberate joke on Beethoven's part. A loud chord after four bars appears to reprimand the musicians for wasting time on such trivialities. But the tune persists for a while before yielding to the "storm" music, which after another turn of the *scherzoso* section concludes the quintet.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

The Bourbaki Ensemble, formed in 2001, is a chamber string orchestra based at St. Stephen's Church, Newtown. The Ensemble takes a particular interest in Australian music and has performed works by Australian composers including Nigel Butterley, Peter Sculthorpe, Robert Davidson and Betty Beath.

Charles Denis Sauter Bourbaki (1816–1897) was a figure of great importance in the French military during the middle years of the nineteenth century. The Bourbaki Panorama in Lucerne (`www.bourbakipanorama.ch`) commemorates the internment of Bourbaki's army in Switzerland in 1871, an event which prompted the first major campaign of the Red Cross. Before taking up his military career, Bourbaki had been a music student, and a member of the circle which collected around the young Hector Berlioz. In 1833, shortly after Berlioz' return from his tenure of the *Prix de Rome*, the *Trio Bourbaki* was formed with the idea of revolutionising French chamber music. Bourbaki (violin), Berlioz (flageolet and guitar) and Louis–Antoine Jullien (ophicleide) succeeded in attracting enough subscribers to fund a tour of Europe and America, the trio's repertoire to have been especially composed by Berlioz. But with Berlioz' interests turning more and more to orchestral composition, the music was not forthcoming and the enterprise foundered.

BOURBAKI 2006

The first Bourbaki Ensemble concert for 2006 will take place on **Sunday 9 April** in St. Stephen's, and we are delighted to welcome as guest soloists the outstanding vocal ensemble Halcyon (Alison Morgan, soprano; Jenny Duck–Chong, mezzo). Jenny will perform one of Benjamin Britten's last works, the dramatic cantata *Phaedra*, accompanied by strings, harpsichord and percussion. Alison will sing a cycle of songs by Earl Kim (1920–1998), an American–born composer of Korean parentage. *Where Grief Slumbers* sets poems by Rimbaud and Apollinaire; reviewers on `amazon.com` have described it as "breathtaking" and "an amazing work of art". Of the fourth song, *Ophelia*, another writes that "one can almost hear her drowning".

On **Sunday 3 September** and **Sunday 10 September**, at Newtown and Macquarie University, we shall present one of our occasional forays into earlier music. There will be excerpts from J. S. Bach's *Art of Fugue*; the E major violin concerto, with soloist David Saffir; and Mozart's uncompromising *Adagio and Fugue*. Of course, we won't be neglecting Australian composers: Stephen Leek's *On this ground. . .* is based on Bach's fifth cello suite, while a story from Bach's biographer Spitta is the inspiration for Graeme Koehne's *To His Servant Bach God Grants a Final Glimpse: the Morning Star*.

Don't forget that `users.tpg.com.au/ddangell` always has up–to–date details of Bourbaki Ensemble activities. We hope that you have enjoyed this year's concerts, and that we shall see you again in 2006.

Programme details subject to change