THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

and

HALCYON

tragic heroines: music for voice and strings

Vaughan Williams Variants on *Dives and Lazarus*
Domenico Giannetta Adriana Suite
Earl Kim Where Grief Slumbers
Alex Pozniak Spectres
Benjamin Britten Phaedra

Alison Morgan, soprano
Jenny Duck–Chong, mezzo soprano
David Angell, conductor

2.30 pm, Sunday 9 April 2006
St. Stephen's Church, Newtown

Welcome to the first Bourbaki Ensemble performance for 2006! We are thrilled to be joined in this concert by vocal duo *Halcyon* in a programme which traces the artistic lineage of three tragic heroines from literature, legend and history. The mythical character Phaedra is the source of a rich literary legacy, one of its branches leading through Racine's tragedy to the Britten cantata which concludes this afternoon's programme, while the life of Adrienne Lecouvreur, a prominent figure on the French eighteenth–century stage, inspired a somewhat fancifully plotted opera by Cilèa and hence, at one further remove, Domenico Giannetta's tribute. Shakespeare's Ophelia has prompted quantities of poetry, including the lines of Arthur Rimbaud set by composer Earl Kim in the song cycle *Where Grief Slumbers*.

We are proud and excited to present today the premiere performance of a new work by talented young Sydney composer Alex Pozniak. *Spectres* is a piece that was especially written for the Bourbaki Ensemble at the invitation of David Angell. In 2005, Alex was selected to participate in the Ku–Ring–Gai Philharmonic Orchestra's "young composers' workshop", for which he composed the orchestral work *Lento*. As a result of playing in this workshop, David approached Alex with the offer to write a work for Bourbaki. Though (as Alex explains in his programme note) the work does not follow any specific programmatic ideas, the title is a good guide to the spirit of this thoughtful and elusive composition. We hope you will enjoy it!

The main channel for publicising Bourbaki Ensemble concerts is our mailing list. If you wish to add your email address to the list, please fill out one of the forms available at the door and return it at interval or after the concert. You can find full details of forthcoming performances, as well as an informative archive of programme notes, at `users.tpg.com.au/ddangell`.

PROGRAMME

Traditional Dives and Lazarus

Jenny Duck–Chong, mezzo soprano

Ralph Vaughan Williams Five Variants on *Dives and Lazarus*

Domenico Giannetta Adriana Suite, for string orchestra

I Andante sostenuto
II Andante con moto
III Allegro

Earl Kim Where Grief Slumbers

1: Listen to it rain
2: from *Drunken Boat*
3: It's raining
4: Ophelia
5: The Farewell
6: The Departure
7: The girl with orange lips

Alison Morgan, soprano

INTERVAL
20 minutes

Alex Pozniak Spectres

Benjamin Britten Phaedra, Op. 93

Prologue—Recitative—Presto —Recitative—Adagio

Jenny Duck–Chong, mezzo soprano

In considering the music of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it is often felt that the "folk–song" composers – Bartók, Kodály, Holst and others – represent a tendency opposed to and irreconcilable with the great late Romantic symphonists such as Mahler, Bruckner and Sibelius. While this point of view is not inadmissible, an exception to the rule, an exception likewise to many other rules, and a composer who resolutely followed his own vision in defiance of public expectations and critical opinion was **Ralph Vaughan Williams** (1872–1958). For while Vaughan Williams took an active interest in English folk song, collecting and preserving traditional music before it was engulfed by the flood–tide of urbanisation and the twentieth century's rapid homogenisation of world culture, he also wrote no fewer than nine symphonies, which occupy a central place among his compositions.

Indeed, Vaughan Williams' entire mature musical output can be viewed as a series of works clustered along the backbone of the symphonies. The fourth symphony, for example, a violent and dissonant work which appalled listeners who had thought they knew what to expect from the composer, is associated with *Job: a Masque for Dancing* and the opera *Riders to the Sea*. The fifth symphony, by contrast, is serene and harmonious, though never thoughtlessly so; it is related to a number of works including *The Pilgrim's Progress* and the *Five Variants on 'Dives and Lazarus'*.

In folk music, the correspondence between words and music is commonly far from unique: the same tune can accommodate different words, while different singers will often set similar words to subtly different melodies. Vaughan Williams described the *Five Variants on 'Dives and Lazarus'* as a series of "reminiscences", from his own and others' folk music collections, of songs relating the New Testament parable of the rich man and the beggar. Scored for strings and one or more harps, the work was first performed in Carnegie Hall, Sir Adrian Boult conducting the New York Philharmonic as part of the 1939 World Fair. The basic theme, richly scored for strings in eight or more parts, leads into a variant in which a triple–time version of the melody is shared between lower and upper strings. The second variant, beginning with a slightly slower and intensely quiet theme for violas and a whispered violin counterpoint, develops into an exultant *fortissimo* for the full ensemble. There follows a third variant featuring solo violin with harp support, and a fourth in which the violas introduce a more robust and dance–like character. The climactic fifth variant breaks off after a dozen bars to reveal a meditative cello solo, and the work ends with peacefully radiant seventeen–part string chords and harp arpeggios.

In the end, Vaughan Williams' devotion to folk song was an aspect of his concern that music should both reflect and serve the whole fabric of society. It is surely fitting that when the ashes of this "extraordinary, ordinary man" (as the writer Michael Kennedy described him) were interred in Westminster Abbey, the first music to be played was his own *Variants on 'Dives and Lazarus'*.

Young Italian composer **Domenico Giannetta** was born in Palmi, southern Italy, in 1974. He studied composition at the Conservatorio Francesco Cilèa in Reggio Calabria, commencing in 1987 at the age of just thirteen and graduating in 1998. While his early compositions favour the piano, more recently he has developed a particular interest in instrumental chamber music. His catalogue also includes vocal, choral and orchestral works.

Francesco Cilèa (1866–1950), also a native of Palmi, composed a handful of highly regarded operas before the age of forty, but then virtually retired from composition, devoting himself instead to a series of academic posts including the directorship of the Naples Conservatorium. His opera *L'Arlesiana* was well received at its premiere in 1897, the cast including Enrico Caruso in his first major success. Without doubt, however, Cilèa's masterpiece is *Adriana Lecouvreur*, the tale of the great eighteenth century French tragic actress. While the historical accuracy of the opera is questionable – Adriana's death, occasioned by a poisoned bunch of violets, can safely be set down as one of the more improbable among the many improbabilities of operatic plots – the work features a stream of poignant melody which has gained it a lasting place in the repertoire both of Italian and of overseas houses.

Domenico Giannetta's *Adriana Suite* for string orchestra was first performed in 2002 to mark the centenary of the premiere of Cilèa's opera. It comprises free transcriptions of three arias from *Adriana Lecouvreur*; while not reproducing the originals note for note, Giannetta has taken great pains to preserve their spirit, composing a suite which is by turns melancholy, plaintive and passionate. The first movement is based upon Adriana's act IV aria *Poveri fiori*: "Poor flowers, gems of the meadows, born only yesterday, yet dying today, like the vows of a treacherous heart." The violets which Adriana gave to Maurizio, Count of Saxony, yesterday have been returned to her, causing her to believe that he no longer loves her. Underlying the second movement is *Io sono l'umile ancella*, in effect the heroine's motto theme, in which she declares herself to be the humble servant of the arts. The finale transcribes *La dolcissima effigie sorridente*, Maurizio's declaration of love for Adriana: "In you I see again the lovely smiling image of your dear mother". A reprise of *Poveri fiori* brings the suite to a close.

Born in Dinuba, California to a Korean immigrant family, **Earl Kim** (1920–1998) went on to study composition with a range of eminent teachers including Arnold Schoenberg, Ernest Bloch and Roger Sessions. Much of his output is built around vocal music, both in stage and concert works, and he was closely involved with coaching and accompanying singers.

Kim's music tends to the lyrical and introspective rather than the dramatic, and his concern with beauty of texture and sensuality of line gives it more than a few echoes of Debussy. Perhaps not coincidentally, Kim has often been attracted to texts by French writers. He has a notable collection of works setting words of Samuel Beckett, who, while Irish by birth, was long resident in Paris and wrote both in English and in French. *Where Grief Slumbers* sets English versions of seven poems by two of the most revolutionary of French poets, Guillaume Apollinaire (1880–1918) and Arthur Rimbaud (1854–1891). The cycle is scored for soprano solo with the accompaniment of string orchestra and harp; its predominantly high tessitura is emphasized by the absence of double basses in the ensemble.

The verses chosen by Kim for *Where Grief Slumbers* deal with themes of loss and separation. In the first song, *Listen to it rain*, the soprano line drifts slowly downwards in an evocation of a light drizzle soaking the Flanders fields where Apollinaire spent the last months of his life. The fourth, Rimbaud's *Ophelia*, begins memorably with an extended soprano solo which lasts over two minutes without accompaniment before the orchestra enters with an evocation of distant horns. Towards the end of the movement the strings surround the voice with a glorious radiance, before a further brief unaccompanied solo portrays Ophelia's sad end. One hears suppressed sobs in the rocking triplets which begin the sixth movement, *The Departure*. The mysterious final song seems to portray a world of serenity and consolation, and concludes with bell–like chords, perhaps heralding a longed–for dawn after a night of grief and sorrow.

Alex Pozniak (born 1982) is currently pursuing a master's degree in composition at the University of Sydney, under the guidance of Matthew Hindson. Working with composers Anne Boyd and Ian Shanahan during his undergraduate years, Alex went on to obtain First Class Honours and the University Medal in 2005, the year in which his mentorship with Hindson began. Works from his honours year included music for solo piano, for ensembles based around piano and computerised drums, an orchestral work, and a series of electronic music compositions. His main musical inspirations come from Tōru Takemitsu, avant–garde rock, heavy metal, Merzbow's Noise music, ambient music and free improvisation.

While other recent works by Alex have explored speed, rhythm and intense dynamics, *Spectres* sees a return to the sound world of the orchestral *Lento*. Much of the focus of *Spectres* dwells on sonorities that would normally be lost within a musical argument. Its five short movements maintain a somewhat monochromatic hue, the organisation of the work in a loose arch form – movements 1 and 5 form a pair, as do movements 2 and 4 – contributing to this sense of uniformity. Pitches are sustained, softly, and gestures are purposefully halted in a play between stasis and gradual awakening. Nothing is too fleshed out. It would be futile to force an explicit program onto the music in *Spectres*, for the purpose of the work is to let sounds be themselves. If the soft and slow sounds bring the listener into a way of close listening, then the compositional goal is achieved.

Programme note by kind courtesy of the composer.

Benjamin Britten (1913–1976) was associated as a composer and an accompanist with some of England's finest singers. His long musical partnership with Peter Pears produced such works as the *Serenade* for tenor, horn and strings (performed by the Bourbaki Ensemble in 2002), and one of his last works was the cantata *Phaedra*, composed for Dame Janet Baker.

In Greek legend, Phaedra was the daughter of Minos, the granddaughter of Zeus and wife of Theseus. Phaedra fell in love with her stepson Hippolytus, and upon being rebuffed killed herself, leaving behind a letter in which she accused Hippolytus of attempting to force himself upon her.

If this all sounds rather sordid, it must be added that later versions of the story credit Phaedra with considerably more nobility and depth of character. Racine's Phaedra (and, following him, Britten's) struggles against her feelings for Hippolytus, and before her death proclaims the latter's innocence rather than seeking to embroil him in scandal and treason.

Britten's cantata consists of five sections which form a continuous whole. In the *Prologue* Phaedra describes the presence of Hippolytus on her marriage day. A high, joyous violin theme falls silent to reveal an eerie texture which hints at what is to come. There follows a *Recitative*, relating Phaedra's first encounter with Hippolytus; the succeeding *Presto*, addressed directly to Hippolytus, describes her inner turmoil. In the second *Recitative* Phaedra tells her confidante Oenone of her decision to die. The final *Adagio* is spoken to Theseus himself: having already swallowed poison, Phaedra assures him of his son's innocence. Her last words, "My eyes at last give up their light, and see the day they've soiled resume its purity", lead into a sort of epilogue in which, over an unvarying bass note, different instruments recapitulate the main musical features of the score. Violins and violas end the cantata with a faint sigh.

Jenny Duck–Chong, mezzo soprano

Mezzo soprano Jenny Duck–Chong has established herself as a versatile and intelligent musician. She is sought after by Sydney's finest vocal ensembles and has performed extensively with Opera Australia, Pinchgut Opera, The Song Company and Cantillation. She has worked with conductors such as Reinbert de Leeuw, Gianluigi Gelmetti, Christopher Hogwood and Jane Glover and ensembles as varied as the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and the Kevin Hunt Jazz Trio. As co–founder of Halcyon she has commissioned and premiered many Australian works and also championed international works by Saariaho, Erkoreka, Beamish, Hui and many young composers. Recording credits include mezzo soloist on the ABC Classics recording of Faure's *La Naissance de Venus*, Teddy Tahu Rhodes' CD *The Voice* and Pinchgut Opera's *The Fairy Queen*. This year Jenny will sing and travel extensively with The Song Company.

Alison Morgan, soprano

English–born soprano Alison Morgan is one of Australia's foremost interpreters of contemporary vocal music, performing as a soloist with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, The Australian Ballet, Pinchgut Opera, The Song Company, Ensemble Offspring, Sydney Alpha Ensemble and Cantillation, and featuring in numerous broadcasts and recordings. As a co–founder of Halcyon, she has been instrumental in commissioning and performing a wealth of new Australian chamber music. In 2005 Alison gave the world premiere of Rosalind Page's *Hrafnsongvar* and performed at the Nigel Butterley 70th Birthday Festival. This year she will premiere several new works with Halcyon, appearing both in Sydney and interstate. Alison has featured in numerous recording projects, including the soundtrack for the winning Tropfest film *Uno Amore*, Purcell's *The Fairy Queen* with Pinchgut and ABC CDs *Glorious Night* and *Silent Night*.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

The Bourbaki Ensemble is a string orchestra based at St. Stephen's Church, Newtown. Formed in 2001, the Ensemble is keenly devoted to local and overseas music of the twentieth and twenty first centuries, and in 2005 performed works by Australian composers Peter Sculthorpe, Paul Stanhope and Richard Meale.

General Charles Denis Sauter Bourbaki was a prominent figure in Parisian artistic circles in the 1840s. While his first love was music, he was also a connoisseur of the theatre and a constant admirer of the great actress Rachel (1821–1858; real name Élisa Félix). *Le Cobaye*, an obscure Parisian theatrical journal published for less than a decade, mentions Bourbaki's presence in the audience for Rachel's debut in the title role of Racine's *Phèdre* (21 January 1843), and again for her triumph in Scribe and Legouvé's *Adrienne Lecouvreur* (1849).

Violins Emlyn Lewis–Jones, Martin Lee, Alastair Duff–Forbes, Alan Foster, Deborah McGowan, Ian Watson, Justin White, Richard Willgoss.

Violas Natalie Adby, Paul Hoskinson, Kathryn Ramsay, Amy Stevens.

Violoncellos Steve Meyer, Imogen Granwal, Nicholas Thomas.

Bass Sasha Marker.

Harp Leigha Dark.

Harpsichord Joanna Tondys.

Percussion Jocelyn Fegent, Merrilee McNaught, Kane Wheatley.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

Bach and his legacy: music for strings

J.S. Bach excerpts from *The Art of Fugue*

J.S. Bach Violin Concerto in E major

Mozart Adagio and Fugue in C minor

C.P.E. Bach Symphony No. 2 in B♭ major

Reger O Mensch, bewein' dein' Sünde gross

Stephen Leek On this ground…

Graeme Koehne To His Servant Bach…

2.30 pm, Sunday 3 September 2006

St. Stephen's Church, Newtown

Tickets $18, concessions $10

2.30 pm, Sunday 10 September 2006

Macquarie Theatre, Macquarie University

Admission free

The next Bourbaki Ensemble programme, one of our occasional forays into earlier music, presents works which testify to the immeasurable influence of J.S. Bach. As well as Bach's own music, including the E major violin concerto, with soloist David Saffir, we demonstrate how Mozart followed his example while Bach's sons sought to develop new directions. The chorale prelude BWV622 was orchestrated by one of Bach's most fervent nineteenth century admirers. Two Australian works show that Bach's influence is still felt by composers half a world away and three centuries later.

Further information `users.tpg.com.au/ddangell`

Programme details subject to change