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…

David Saffir, violin

David Angell, conductor

2.30 p.m., Sunday 3 September 2006
St. Stephen's Church, 189 Church St, Newtown

2.30 p.m., Sunday 10 September 2006
Macquarie Theatre, Macquarie University

Welcome to the Bourbaki Ensemble's September concerts! In this programme we present a survey of the immense influence exerted on composers through the ages by the music of Johann Sebastian Bach. As well as Bach's own music, we perform Mozart's uncompromising *Adagio and Fugue*, a work which was the immediate fruit of Mozart's study of the great Baroque composers. A century or so later, Max Reger expressed his esteem for Bach's music in various works, including an orchestration for strings of the chorale prelude *O Mensch, bewein dein' Sünde groß*. And, moving forward another century, we find Bach's music providing the basis for two pieces by contemporary Australian composers. By way of contrast we show how Bach's style had a negative, rather than a positive, effect on the musical generation in which his sons were leading figures.

Our April concert this year included Benjamin Britten's dramatic cantata *Phaedra*, performed by mezzo–soprano Jenny Duck–Chong, and the evocative *Where Grief Slumbers* by Earl Kim, with soprano Alison Morgan. There were also pieces by Vaughan Williams and by young composers Alex Pozniak (Australia) and Domenico Giannetta (Italy). Those of you who attended would probably have noticed that the performance was recorded by Kerry Joyner of 2MBS–FM. If you missed the concert – or if you would like to hear it again! – Kerry will present this recording in a broadcast at 9 p.m. on Sunday 17 September.

The main channel for publicising Bourbaki Ensemble concerts is our mailing list. To add your email address to the list, go to our website at `users.tpg.com.au/ddangell` and click on the link to send us an email. The website offers full details of forthcoming performances, as well as an informative archive of programme notes and fascinating items from the life and times of General Bourbaki. Thank you for attending our concerts in 2006, and we hope to see you again in 2007.

PROGRAMME

J.S. Bach The Art of Fugue, BWV 1080: Contrapunctus I — Canon alla ottava — Contrapunctus IX

C.P.E. Bach Symphony No. 2 in B♭ major
I Allegro di molto II Poco adagio
III Presto

J.S. Bach Sarabande, from Suite No. 5 for unaccompanied cello, BWV 1011

Steve Meyer, cello

Stephen Leek On This Ground…

W.A. Mozart Adagio and Fugue in C minor, K 546

INTERVAL — 20 minutes

J.S. Bach Violin Concerto in E major, BWV 1042
I Allegro II Adagio
III Allegro assai

David Saffir, violin

Max Reger Aria: O Mensch, bewein dein' Sünde groß

Graeme Koehne To His Servant Bach, God Grants A Final Glimpse: The Morning Star

J.S. Bach The Art of Fugue, BWV 1080: Canon alla duodecima — Fuga a 3 soggetti

The Art of Fugue by **Johann Sebastian Bach** (1685–1750) is a compilation of some twenty fugues and canons covering virtually the whole range of baroque contrapuntal technique. All the pieces are based (more or less closely) upon a single theme; this fugal subject is then combined with subsidiary themes, turned upside down, played faster or slower, and treated to an astounding range of elaborations.

Except for two pieces entitled "Fuga a 2 Clavier", *The Art of Fugue* does not call for any specific instrumentation: the score simply comprises two, three or four staves with no further indication of how Bach expected the pieces to be performed. The four–part fugues are often performed by strings, even though this requires the second part to be adjusted on a handful of occasions when it descends below the range of the violin.

We begin today's concert with *Contrapunctus I*, which immediately introduces the main theme of the collection. This will be followed by a two–part *Canon alla ottava* for harpsichord, and then the ninth fugue. The latter introduces a new theme beginning with a characteristic octave leap; however, this is soon revealed to be a counterpoint to the main fugue subject, and for most of the fugue the two themes are inseparable.

With Johann Sebastian Bach and George Frideric Handel the baroque period in music came to a close. Prominent among composers of the next generation, whose music helped to inaugurate the classical era, were Johann Sebastian's sons Johann Christian (1735–1782) and **Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach** (1714–1788). The latter obtained in 1740 a post as court musician to Frederick the Great, a large part of his duties being to accompany the king's flute playing. Bach seems to have been somewhat frustrated by Frederick's conservative musical tastes, and it may be that he over–reacted to the freedom he enjoyed in a later position at Hamburg. A recent recording of his symphonies has been reviewed in the following terms.

> “Fantastical and far-fetched,” was how one 18th–century writer described the music of J.S. Bach’s second son, Carl Philipp Emanuel. And you can hear what he meant in the astonishing set of string symphonies CPE composed at the request of Baron Gottfried van Swieten in 1773. The Baron stipulated that Bach should “let himself go, without worrying about difficulties of execution”. Which he duly did, in what are surely the weirdest symphonies of the century.
>
> In every movement, Bach seems hell–bent on subverting the norms of harmony, rhythm and dynamics. Paradox is the order of the day, with each fleeting promise of galant euphony disrupted by a frenzied outburst or a violent swerve to an alien chord. Often the music lives on the edge of a nervous breakdown. First movements break off suddenly in mid–air, adagios veer between intense, self–communing pathos and stuttering incoherence, finales explode from nowhere. At times, the effect is profoundly troubling; at others, the music evokes Monty Python.

The writer goes on to mention Bach’s “wild, wilful style” and refers to him as “the 18th century’s most inspired eccentric”.

A more sympathetic commentator sets C.P.E. Bach firmly in the context of post–Enlightenment German culture. The rationality and ordered progress of the baroque age, as exemplified by the fugal writing of J.S. Bach (though where does this point of view leave Handel’s operatic extravagances?) was to give way to a music of human emotions, in which the heart was no less important than the head. Monty Python or proto–Romanticism? Depth of feeling or lack of compositional experience? In the end, each listener must decide for himself.

The great cellist Pablo Casals said of Bach, "He is among those geniuses who shine over all nations and all times." In making this assessment Casals was, perhaps, thinking above all of Bach's six suites for unaccompanied cello. In these works, and even more so in the sonatas and partitas for unaccompanied violin, Bach's contrapuntal achievement is staggering. How can one even contemplate writing counterpoint, the interweaving of simultaneous melodic strands, for a single, essentially monodic, instrument? Yet Bach manages it. In the cello suites the greatest displays of counterpoint are to be found in the opening movements. They are succeeded in each case by a series of dances in which, though counterpoint is rarely quite absent, melodic and rhythmic aspects come to the fore. In each suite a slow *Sarabande* takes a central place among four faster dances.

Australian composer **Stephen Leek** (born 1959), a cellist himself, based his composition *On This Ground...* upon the sarabande from Bach's fifth cello suite. The piece was written in 1993, when Stephen held the post of Composer in Residence at Sydney Grammar School. The Bach sarabande is transformed in various ways in the course of *On This Ground...*, though the original is clearly heard in the opening notes of the violas. At the very end of the piece the composer instructs the cellists in the orchestra to play, each at their own tempo, the first phrase of the sarabande, as if bidding farewell to Bach's suite.

In today's concert the performance of *On This Ground...* will be preceded by the Bach *Sarabande* in its original form.

One of the unfortunate things about being a child prodigy is that people don't always take you seriously. In the popular imagination, **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** (1756–1791) is frequently thought of as composing concerti and symphonies with the greatest ease, knocking off one or two – as it were – each day between lunch and dinner. While Mozart often did write with great fluency, he took composition very seriously, and it does him a disservice to suggest that he had no need of application and industry. In the early 1780s he made an intensive study of contrapuntal writing in the works of Bach and Handel; one of the results of this immersion in the baroque was the Fugue, K 426, (1783) for two pianos.

Mozart returned to this work five years later. Perhaps feeling that it lacked gravity, he rescored the fugue for string orchestra, and added a slow introduction to alleviate the abruptness of the opening. The *Adagio* begins with stern dotted figures very much in the style of a baroque overture; its alternations of *forte* and *piano*, and the dissonance of its harmonies, create a somewhat disturbing and deeply expressive movement.

After a half close, the fugue begins in the celli and bass. Its uncompromising solidity and grim aspect can be compared with little else in Mozart's output, except for parts of the *Requiem*.

The two surviving violin concertos of **Johann Sebastian Bach**, along with the double concerto and the four orchestral suites, were written about 1720 when Bach was in the service of Prince Leopold at Cöthen. He also composed at least two further solo violin concertos and a triple concerto; these works are not extant in their original form, but have been reconstructed from later versions which Bach made for harpsichord.

The E major concerto consists of two fast movements separated by an *adagio*. The three firm notes and anapaestic (short–short–long) rhythm of the opening generate the whole of the first movement. The second is, as a well–known writer has remarked, a wonderful example of Bach's ability to conjure great music out of (almost) nothing. The rhythm of the bass line in the first bar underpins more than half of the movement, with the solo violin contributing an elaborate and magical descant. Bach balances the improvisatory character of the *adagio* with a most formally structured finale: in a series of sixteen–bar segments an unvarying orchestral *ritornello* alternates with virtuosic solo passages.

After Bach's death his music diminished in popular esteem for almost a century. The turning point came with the revival by Mendelssohn of the *St. Matthew Passion* in 1829, and by the end of the century Bach had regained the place which is surely his due. One of Bach's most fervent admirers in the late nineteenth century was **Max Reger** (1873–1916). In 1915 he arranged for strings Bach's chorale prelude *O Mensch, bewein dein' Sünde groß* ("O Man, bewail thy grievous sin"). Although the constantly varying dynamics are rather removed from the practice of Bach's day, there is no doubting the richness and beauty of the work. Moreover, the tempo, decreasing from very slow to immensely slow, and the poignant harmonic twist in the penultimate bar, are all there in Bach's organ music.

Graeme Koehne was born in Adelaide in 1956 and studied at the Elder Conservatorium, University of Adelaide, where he is now Head of Composition. In the intervening years Graeme spent two years at Yale University on a Harkness Fellowship, where private lessons with Virgil Thomson strongly influenced his future compositional ideas. Since returning to Adelaide he has earned a reputation as one of Australia's leading composers, especially in the fields of orchestral music and dance.

A tale from Bach's biographer Spitta inspired Koehne's *To His Servant Bach, God Grants A Final Glimpse: The Morning Star* (an unwieldy title which the composer, in conversation, helpfully abbreviates to *THSB*). Spitta wrote,

> . . . so that Bach was henceforth totally blind. . . On July 18 he suddenly found his eyesight restored, and could bear daylight; but this was life's parting greeting. . . he died on Tuesday, July 28, 1750. . .

THSB consists of a setting of a chorale melody employed by Bach in his Cantata No. 1, *Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern* ("How beauteous beams the Morning Star"). At first only a flowing accompaniment is heard, the melody itself entering in the second violins about a minute and a half into the piece.

Today's concert concludes with two more pieces from *The Art of Fugue*. In the *Canon alla duodecima*, performed today as a harpsichord solo, a theme obliquely related to the principal fugue theme sets out in the left hand and is joined a few bars later by the same theme in the right hand, an octave and a fifth higher. The incomplete *Fuga a 3 soggetti* is one of Bach's greatest achievements in counterpoint. The first of the three subjects is (essentially) the main theme of *The Art of Fugue*; the second, in flowing quavers, appears initially in the second violins. The third theme, introduced by the violas, begins with the four notes B♭–A–C–B♮. In German nomenclature these pitches are denoted B–A–C–H; thus Bach is, so to speak, signing his name to his last, unfinished, work. After Bach combines all three themes simultaneously, the four lines fall silent one by one; a note on the manuscript, in the hand of C.P.E. Bach, reads,

> In this fugue, where the name BACH is introduced in the countersubject, the composer died.

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!

David Saffir, violin

Violinist David Saffir was born into a musical family in Melbourne. After studies with Nathan Gutman in Melbourne, he went to the Tasmanian Conservatorium where he studied with Professor Jan Sedivka. In 1978, he won the State Final of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's Instrumental and Vocal Competition and shortly afterwards was appointed as Deputy Principal Violin in the State Orchestra of Victoria. From 1980 to 1983 David studied at the Kölner Musikhochschule with Professor Igor Ozim and members of the Amadeus Quartet. In 1983, he returned to Australia to lead the New England String Quartet, resident ensemble at the University of New England in Armidale, a position he held for three years. From 1986 to 1989 he freelanced in Sydney, working with all the major orchestras, and subsequently took a position as Director of Strings at Newington College. In 2000 he was appointed Director of Strings at Barker College, where he now works with students throughout the school as an instrumental teacher and conductor. David continues to perform professionally as a soloist, chamber musician and orchestral leader and in 2006 was appointed Concertmaster of the Willoughby Symphony Orchestra.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

The Bourbaki Ensemble is a string orchestra based at St. Stephen's Church, Newtown. Formed in 2001, the Ensemble is strongly committed to playing music of the twentieth and twenty first centuries, and in 2006 performs works by Australian composers Graeme Koehne, Stephen Leek and Alex Pozniak.

General Charles Denis Sauter Bourbaki (1816–1897) was noted in his early years as a precociously talented young scientist. Even as a schoolboy he seems to have been in correspondence with the slightly older Charles Darwin and to have heard some early speculations on evolution and natural selection, though Darwin's modern biographers generally place these ideas some years later. Despite being still in his teens, Bourbaki was seized by the implications of Darwin's thinking and sought to accompany him on the *Beagle*. The Admiralty, however, could not see in a French citizen's desire to sail with a British ship any motive other than espionage, and Bourbaki was not permitted to join the voyage.

Violins David Saffir, Alastair Duff–Forbes, Natalie Adby, Alan Foster, Martin Lee, Emlyn Lewis–Jones, Deborah McGowan, Justin White.

Violas Kathryn Ramsay, Janice Buttle, Kate Hughes, Amy Stevens.

Violoncellos Steve Meyer, Nicholas Thomas.

Bass Sasha Marker.

Harpsichord Chris Berensen.

ORCHESTRA 143

Bach Cantata No. 51, “Jauchzet Gott”
Haydn Symphony No. 64 in A major
Boyce Symphony No. 1 in B♭ major
Sor Simfonia No. 3 in F major

Valda Wilson, soprano
David Angell, conductor

3.00 pm, Sunday 12 November 2006
St. James’ Church, King St, Turramurra

The final Orchestra 143 concert for 2006 will include Bach’s “Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen”, a cantata for solo soprano which also features a dazzling obbligato trumpet part. Haydn’s Symphony No. 64, which bears the enigmatic title *Tempora mutantur*, is full of surprises for both performers and listeners; some commentators have suggested that the work originated in incidental music composed by Haydn for a production of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*.

The remaining works on the programme afford a glimpse into the origins of the symphony. William Boyce was one of the leading English composers in the generation which followed Handel; his eight short symphonies are attractive examples of the early classical style. While the Catalan composer Fernando Sor remains a favourite among guitarists, his single–movement *simfonies* – in effect operatic overtures – are rarely performed.

Further information `www.orchestra143.org`
Programme details subject to change