# THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

diversions and dances: music for strings

**Mozart** Divertimento for strings in D major, K136
**Pierre Max Dubois** Saxophone concerto
**George Palmer** The Ruritanian Dances
**Mendelssohn** String Symphony No. 10
**Carl Nielsen** *Little Suite* for strings

Jason Xanthoudakis, saxophone
David Angell, conductor

**2.30 p.m., Sunday 4 March 2007**

**St. Stephen's Church, Newtown**

Welcome to the Bourbaki Ensemble's 2007 season! For our first concert we present a programme of witty, sparkling and entertaining music from three different centuries. In particular, we are delighted to be performing music by George Palmer. Neither *The Ruritanian Dances* nor any other of George's compositions was heard in public until about three years ago. Since then his works have gained an enormous amount of recognition and esteem, having been performed by the Sydney Symphony, featured on TV and released on CD.

We are very glad to welcome as guest soloist for this concert Jason Xanthoudakis. Perhaps the first thoughts to come to mind regarding the saxophone concern its indispensible role in jazz; but the instrument also has a significant "classical" repertoire. Today Jason will perform the concerto by French composer Pierre Max Dubois. Written in 1959, the work displays a characteristically Gallic spirit and charm.

At the beginning of a new year it is a pleasure to acknowledge our indebtedness to Peter Rodgers and all at St. Stephen's Church for allowing us to perform here. With its attractive architecture and marvellous acoustics, the church is unsurpassed as a venue for small ensemble concerts. After the performance you may care to explore the surrounding area, which has many fascinating reminiscences of the early history of Sydney. A pamphlet is available describing a self–guided tour of the church and cemetery.

If you enjoy today's concert, please help us to keep in touch by adding your email address to our mailing list. You can simply write it down on the form available at the church door, or visit our website at `users.tpg.com.au/ddangell`. The website contains past programmes, future plans, an informative programme note archive. . . and everything you could possibly want to know about General Bourbaki.

# PROGRAMME

**Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** Divertimento for strings in D major, K136

I Allegro
II Andante
III Presto

**Pierre Max Dubois** Concerto for alto saxophone and string orchestra

I Lento espressivo – allegro
II Sarabande: lento nostalgico
III Rondo: allegretto

Jason Xanthoudakis, saxophone

**George Palmer** The Ruritanian Dances

I Allegro energico e ben marcato
II Pesante ma con fuoco
III Allegretto

**INTERVAL** — 20 minutes

**Felix Mendelssohn** String Symphony No. 10 in B minor

**Carl Nielsen** *Little Suite*, Op. 1, for string orchestra

I Präludium: andante con moto
II Intermezzo: allegro moderato
III Finale: andante con moto – allegro con brio

The *Divertimento* in D major, K136, is one of three composed in early 1772 by **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** (1756–1791). No fewer than six symphonies also emerged within the first few months of that year. Perhaps Mozart was deliberately allocating himself some time free of public activity; in the latter part of 1771 the fifteen–year–old composer, accompanied by his father Leopold, had undertaken a tour of Italy during which, at one point, he had received the libretto for a new opera *Ascanio in Alba*, composed the music, rehearsed it and seen it performed, all in the space of seven weeks.

The three *Divertimenti* for strings are sometimes referred to as Mozart's "Salzburg symphonies". The term is in some ways rather odd. The works are each in three movements, are very light in texture and are scarcely "symphonic" in the modern sense of the word. On the other hand, Mozart's acknowledged symphonies from 1772 also contain an abundance of fast and joyous music, and he was experimenting with three– and four–movement schemes; the term is therefore perhaps less inappropriate than it seems at first sight.

K136 opens energetically with a combination of vibrant sustained notes and bustling activity in the first violins above an accompaniment which begins with sturdy and rhythmic quavers and later on turns to an insistent syncopation. The second part of the movement introduces a passage of mysterious semiquavers in the second violins underpinning a plaintive melody high in the firsts. The central *andante cantabile* is built upon a series of duets. Initially a pairing of first and second violins opposes another of violas and celli/bass; later the seconds and violas are frequently in partnership. The finale begins with a cheeky three–note figure and is centred upon a passage of fugal and imitative texture led by the second violins.

The saxophone is the most recent of the "standard" wind instruments, having been developed by Adolphe Sax in the early 1840s. Saxophones of four different sizes – soprano, alto, tenor and baritone – are in common use today; many more have been used on occasion. Despite being included in the woodwind group, saxophones have (nearly) always been made of brass, the sound being produced by a single reed attached to a mouthpiece not unlike that of the clarinet.

It is relatively unusual for the symphony orchestra to include saxophones: quite likely there is no particular reason for this besides the fact that the makeup of the orchestra had become fairly standardised since the time of Beethoven's later symphonies, written some thirty years before the invention of the instrument. Nevertheless, important saxophone parts appear in works by Ravel (*Bolero*, and the orchestration of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*), Vaughan Williams (the ninth symphony, and *Job: a masque for dancing* – a wonderfully "sleazy" depiction of Job's hypocritical comforters) and others.

Ever since its "birth" in Paris, the saxophone has been especially well regarded by French composers. **Pierre Max Dubois** (1930–1995) wrote a wide variety of music for saxophone solo, in quartets, with piano and with orchestra. His *Concerto* employs the alto instrument, by and large the favourite among classical composers, with the accompaniment of a string orchestra. The soloist begins with a lengthy and expressive introduction, unaccompanied; a passage of *crescendo* and *accelerando* in the strings breaks off at a second cadenza. The subsequent *allegro* sets out with a forthright and rhythmic theme shared between saxophone and violins. A second theme, followed by increasingly virtuosic passages for the soloist, reappears memorably later in the movement scored for first violins and bass, four octaves apart, together with saxophone and *pizzicato* violas.

In the central movement of the concerto, entitled *Sarabande*, strings set up a simple accompaniment over which the soloist introduces a lengthy theme of melancholy and nostalgic character. As the movement proceeds, the violins take over the theme while the soloist contributes whispering chromatic passages. A section marked *très lent* leads to a close on a chord of A major.

The saxophone leads off the *rondo* finale with a sparkling and vigorous tune somewhat reminiscent of a hornpipe. The movement continues with acrobatic figurations from the soloist, until strings initiate a more relaxed central section whose syncopated close–harmony passages for violins and violas echo the swing bands of the 1930s. The "hornpipe" returns before a dramatic *rallentando* announces the end of the concerto.

**George Palmer** (born 1947) has spent his working life in the legal profession, first as a solicitor and barrister, then as Queen's Counsel, and has been since 2001 a judge in the Supreme Court of NSW. For most of this time he has also been keenly involved in music, composing a great variety of works, none of which he sought to have performed until prompted in 2002 by the approaching death of his father. "Before I realised what was happening," he later wrote, "the project took on a life of its own". This ultimately resulted in a concert of George's string music and a recording of the same programme on CD; further recordings are planned for release this year.

The set of three *Ruritanian Dances* was inspired by a gypsy band heard by the composer in Prague. Since (as the composer confesses) they contain no authentic gypsy music, he gave them the name of the fictional Balkan country immortalised in Anthony Hope's romance *The Prisoner of Zenda*. The first dance crashes in with a wild abandon at the very outset, and is characterised by vivacious melodies, offbeat accents and sudden changes of dynamic level. In the second, *pesante ma con fuoco* (heavy but with fire), the attentive listener will hear echoes of music by Kodály, Bartók and Dvořák. The last boasts almost a dozen separate tunes in alternation and in combination. The dance is at first genial and somewhat deliberate, but accelerates once to a section of pounding chords and skittish responses, and then again to a furious finish.

**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 and tenth employ two separate viola parts throughout.

The earlier of Mendelssohn's string symphonies each comprise three short movements; the latter tend to be of four more substantial movements. The tenth symphony, written in 1823 when the composer was fourteen years of age, is unique in consisting of a single movement only. Was Mendelssohn essaying something more like an older *sinfonia* than a classical symphony? The early romantic style of the symphony, distinctly sombre, and more akin to Schubert than to the Mozartian textures of Mendelssohn's earlier compositions, makes this a doubtful hypothesis. Were subsequent movements planned but not written, or written but then lost? No–one seems to know. In any case, the symphony in the form in which it has come down to us is a concise and completely satisfying work.

A feeling of foreboding pervades the opening *adagio*, with sustained chords for violins and violas underpinned by ominous bass *pizzicati*. Gradually, despite the persistence of apprehensive chromatic harmonies, the music achieves some kind of resolution onto a gentle, lightly scored major triad; but any sense of relaxation is short–lived, as a brief pause introduces a tense, murmuring *allegro*. After seventeen bars a B minor scale bursts out, initiating a turbulent passage, full of activity. This ends as abruptly as it began, revealing a suave *legato* second subject whose accompanying harmonies have still not quite managed to shed all the disturbing chromaticism of the introduction. The movement, in a regular sonata form, continues with a brief development devoted largely to scale passages in unison or thirds, and concludes with a brilliant fast coda.

One of the few Danish composers to achieve international recognition is **Carl Nielsen**. Born in 1865, he spent his boyhood in humble circumstances, but still managed to learn violin, trumpet and trombone and to compose some chamber works. In 1884 he moved to Copenhagen and entered the Conservatorium there, studying under Niels Gade. Later he received a grant which enabled him to travel and study in Europe; upon returning to the Danish capital he took up a post as a violinist in the Royal Theater Orchestra. Gradually his music began to be performed, even though at its premiere his *Little Suite* for strings (1888) had been announced in the press as being by "a Mr Carl Nielsen, whom nobody knows". He continued to compose (though on a lesser scale after a heart attack in 1925) until his death in 1931.

Nielsen's music, most notably his six symphonies and three concertos, has grown in international repute since his death. While based firmly on traditional models, his compositions give frequent evidence of a strongly independent turn of mind. In tonality he came to reject the classical expectation that an extended work should at the end return "home" to the key in which it began, seeing a composition rather as a journey which could lead into unexplored territory without completing a round trip. His scoring is often unconventional, but always carefully thought out in the interests of musical expression. In his clarinet concerto, for example, the orchestra consists solely of strings, bassoons, horns and side drum, while his fourth symphony, *The Inextinguishable*, features a "battle" between two sets of timpani, one placed on each side of the orchestra.

The *Little Suite* consists of three movements, each with a freshness which seems to evoke Denmark's cultural ties with Scandinavia rather than with continental Europe. The opening *Präludium* begins with an expansive theme in the cellos; after a luminous climax, the cello theme is appropriated by violas. There follows an *Intermezzo* in the style of a waltz: initially suggesting the music of Grieg, a central section is perhaps rather more Viennese in character. Nielsen achieves an unusual tone colour in this movement by specifying mutes for the violins, but not for the lower instruments.

Second violins begin the finale by reintroducing the cello theme from the first movement; an *accelerando* leads to a brilliant *allegro* featuring a scintillating accompaniment to a stratospheric violin line. After an extended section in which a dotted rhythm is hurled from one part of the orchestra to another, the suite concludes with a faster coda and a final reminiscence of the principal theme.

**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!

**Jason Xanthoudakis,** saxophone

Jason studied saxophone at Melbourne University (where he has recently graduated with a Master of Music), at the Victorian College of the Arts with Phillip Miechel, Ian Godfrey, Peter Clinch and Terry Noone, and at the Sydney Conservatorium with Mark Walton and James Nightingale.

He has a busy performance schedule including performances with the AOBO, SSO, TSO and MSO, as well as frequent solo recitals around Australia. He has performed live broadcast recitals on 2MBS–FM, has recorded for ABC Classic FM, and has been broadcast on 3MBS–FM, winning the 3MBS Performer of the Year Award in 2000.

In 2002 he performed the Ibert *Concertino da Camera* with the Melbourne Youth Orchestra and won the VCA concerto competition; in 2005 he won the University of Melbourne Faculty of Music concerto competition (wind/voice section).

Jason is very active in the field of contemporary music: several composers have dedicated works to him, and in 2004 he gave the world premieres of six new works for saxophone. See Jason's website at `www.xansax.com` for more information.

## 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 2007 performs Australian music by George Palmer, Peter Sculthorpe, Phillip Wilcher and Christine McCombe.

Charles Denis Sauter Bourbaki (1816–1897) was a leading figure in French military circles at the time of the Franco–Prussian war. In July 1935 the inaugural Bourbaki Congress, formed to encourage research into the life and *milieu* of General Bourbaki, was held at Besse–en–Chandesse, a small town in the Auvergne region. In the event it was soon realised that vast amounts of prepatory work would be required before embarking on any significant Bourbaki studies. Members of the congress therefore set to work on compiling a series of volumes including a *Théorie des ensembles* and a *Théories spectrales*; it is hoped that a definitive biographical account of Bourbaki's period of internment in Switzerland will appear in the near future.

**Violins** Warwick Pulley, Emlyn Lewis–Jones, Natalie Adby, Kathryn Crossing, Alastair Duff–Forbes, Martin Lee, Deborah McGowan, Justin White, Richard Willgoss.

**Violas** Kathryn Ramsay, Paul Hoskinson, Kate Hughes, Amy Stevens.

**Violoncellos** Nicholas Thomas, Ian Macourt, Stela Solar.

**Bass** Mark Szeto.

# THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

Australian and American music for strings

**Copland** Appalachian Spring
**Sculthorpe** Sonata for Strings
**Carl Ruggles** Lilacs
**Elliott Carter** *Elegy* for string orchestra
**Phillip Wilcher** *1791*, for oboe and strings
**Copland** Quiet City

**2.30 pm, Sunday 15 July 2007**
**St. Stephen's Church, Newtown**
Tickets $20, concessions $15

**2.30 pm, Sunday 22 July 2007**
**Macquarie Theatre, Macquarie University**
Admission free

Music from both sides of the Pacific! The Bourbaki Ensemble presents the original chamber version, serene and transparent, of Aaron Copland's ballet *Appalachian Spring*. Two short works from the first half of the twentieth century: in *Lilacs* Carl Ruggles displays the intense visionary quality associated with the music of Charles Ives, and Carter's neoclassical *Elegy* testifies to the considerable French influence on American music of this period.

Guest oboist Rachel Tolmie gives the world premiere of Phillip Wilcher's *1791*, and turns to cor anglais for Copland's haunting nocturne *Quiet City*. Peter Sculthorpe's sonata for strings was inspired by native American melodic outlines and rhythms.

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

Programme details subject to change