THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

Australian and American music for strings

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

Rachel Tolmie, oboe and cor anglais
Andrew Del Riccio, trumpet
David Angell, conductor

2.30 p.m., Sunday 15 July 2007
St. Stephen's Church, Newtown

2.30 p.m., Sunday 22 July 2007
Macquarie Theatre, Macquarie University

Welcome to the Bourbaki Ensemble's second programme of the year! Our concert of twentieth–century Australian and American music for strings includes two major works of Aaron Copland: the ballet suite *Appalachian Spring* and the haunting nocturne *Quiet City*. There will also be short works by the amazing Elliott Carter, still composing in his 99th year, and by Carl Ruggles, a lesser known composer from the early twentieth century. Australian composer Peter Sculthorpe's *Sonata* spans the Pacific in its allusions to the music of native American peoples.

We are also delighted to give the world premiere performances of Sydney composer Phillip Wilcher's *1791*, written especially for our guest soloist, oboist Rachel Tolmie. We are sure that you will enjoy Phillip's thoughtful and expressive work.

It's always a pleasure to perform in the Macquarie University *Music on Winter Sundays* series. We would like to thank the University for its support, and Kerry Klujin for organising the details. And of course we owe a great debt to Peter Rodgers and all at St. Stephen's Newtown, for allowing us to rehearse and perform in their wonderful church.

Many people in our audiences at Newtown make a Bourbaki concert also an opportunity to wander around St. Stephen's and its surrounding cemetery, which is rich in marvellous stories of Sydney's past. But our Macquarie audiences need not miss out on this! – go to `http://users.tpg.com.au/ddangell` for a collection of photographs of church and cemetery by Esther Turnbull. While there you can also read about past and future Bourbaki concerts, join our email list and send us a message – we would love to hear what you think! We hope that you will enjoy today's performance and that you will also join us for our next concert, "requiems for strings", to be given at Newtown in October: see the back of the programme for full details.

PROGRAMME

Aaron Copland Quiet City

Rachel Tolmie, cor anglais
Andrew Del Riccio, trumpet

Elliott Carter *Elegy* for string orchestra

Carl Ruggles Lilacs

Peter Sculthorpe First Sonata for Strings

I Sun Song (Estatico—più mosso)
II Chorale (Con pietà)
III Interlude (Risoluto—Calmo)
IV Chorale (Con pietà)
V Sun Song (Estatico—più mosso)

INTERVAL

20 minutes

Phillip Wilcher *1791*, for oboe and strings

Rachel Tolmie, oboe

Aaron Copland *Appalachian Spring*, original chamber version

Aaron Copland (1900–1990) is generally regarded as the most outstanding American composer of the mid–twentieth century. He was resident for most of his life in New York, and his early works display a notable jazz influence. This style was displaced by more rigorous and modernist tendencies; before long, however, America succumbed to the economic depression of the 1930s, and Copland felt obliged to write music which would communicate more directly with his listeners. Most of the music for which he is best known comes from the next decade or so, and much of it seeks to depict various aspects of American life: the urban (*Quiet City*, 1940), the rural (*Appalachian Spring*, 1944), the frontier (*Billy the Kid*, 1938; *Rodeo*, 1942).

Quiet City originated as incidental music for Irwin Shaw's (unsuccessful) play of the same name. In converting his score into an independent concert piece, Copland replaced a quartet of clarinet, saxophone, trumpet and piano by a string orchestra with solo trumpet and cor anglais. For the most part, the orchestra provides a gentle nocturnal background to the dark–hued lyricism of the cor anglais and the mysterious, nervous commentary of the trumpet.

Perhaps the most astounding musical phenomenon of the late twentieth and early twenty–first centuries is the continuing career of **Elliott Carter**. Born in 1908, his tenth decade has seen the composition of major orchestral works, concertos and chamber music, as well as his first opera. Extensive celebrations are in preparation for his 100th birthday next year.

Carter was born into a well–off New York family and was educated in mathematics and literature at Harvard University. In the 1930s he studied composition with Nadia Boulanger in Paris; his works from this period are animated by Boulanger's neoclassical orientation and by the “populist” ethic which influenced Copland and many other American composers at the time. Unlike Copland, however, Carter came to feel that a true concern for the audience required him to address in his music the widest range of emotional and intellectual experience of which he was capable. Beginning with the Cello Sonata (1948) and First String Quartet (1950) his music has explored levels of complexity rarely matched by other composers, without ever ceasing to serve his expressive aims. Some of Carter’s compositions tackle intellectual and philosophical questions such as the nature of musical time; others, especially vocal works like *A Mirror on which to Dwell*, have profound emotional concerns. Nor is he reluctant to write music of a certain satirical wit: the cast of the opera *What’s Next* consists of the confused but unhurt victims of a motor accident. Many listeners regard Elliott Carter as the foremost composer of the late twentieth century; while few will fully understand his mature works on a first hearing, it can be said with confidence that repeated attentive listening to recordings of his music will reveal a world of wonders.

In today’s concert we present perhaps the most successful composition from Carter’s Paris years. The *Elegy* was written originally for cello and piano, later arranged for string quartet and then for string orchestra (1952); a fourth version, extensively rewritten, is for viola and piano. The work consists of a lengthy melody passed from one section of the orchestra to another; it is accompanied by gently dissonant harmonies for most of its course, before easing into a quiet C major close.

The complete acknowledged works of **Carl Ruggles** (1876–1971) last barely an hour, but the concentration of thought in each of them has gained his music a reputation out of all proportion to its actual duration. Ruggles was born in Massachusetts; apart from four years in Minnesota and fifteen in New York, he spent his whole life in the New England region composing and playing violin, and also painting with no little talent.

Despite owning a deep admiration for the great composers of the past – Bach, Beethoven and Wagner; also, with some reservations, Debussy ("nothing wrong with him that a few weeks in the open air wouldn't cure") – Ruggles remained a resolutely individual composer. Though his music is based upon complex counterpoint learned from Bach, a sense of musical drama inspired by Beethoven and a post–Wagnerian chromatic harmony, the uses to which he puts all these are unique to his own compositions. Some of Ruggles' work recalls that of Charles Ives; beyond this he is an absolutely solitary figure.

Ruggles' two major orchestral works are the awe–inspiring *Sun–treader*, with its titanic opening of pounding timpani and soaring horns, and the three–movement *Men and Mountains*, its title taken from William Blake's "Great things are done when Men and Mountains meet". The second movement, *Lilacs*, is for strings in seven parts and may be performed separately. It has been described by Dorothy Canfield as

> "wistful, frail, tenuously complicated, [telling] of the ebbing–away of humanity from the scenes of its own conquests, of sagging rooftrees and rotting farmhouses, of the soft–footed advance of the forest back over the land which man had wrested into his own hands, of dust on deserted hearthstones. . ."

The conductor Michael Tilson Thomas, a leading advocate of Ruggles' music, adds that

> "the piece witnesses the feeling of New Englanders. . . seeing on the hills the broken chimneys and patches of lilacs that were all that remained of the farms of the boys who had gone to the Civil War and never came home."

The brief three–minute span of *Lilacs* creates through its intensity of expression a sense of loss and an immense sorrow for all that is passing in our world, feelings which persist long after the last chord has faded into silence.

In his autobiography *Sun Music*, **Peter Sculthorpe** (born 1929) speaks of his “enduring love for stringed instruments” and his view of the string quartet as “one of the great achievements of Western civilisation”. This position is amply borne out by his list of works, which includes (so far) sixteen quartets as well as many compositions featuring solo violin, viola or cello. He has also arranged three of the quartets for string orchestra under the title *Sonata for Strings*; today we perform the first of these.

The *First Sonata* was arranged in 1983 from Sculthorpe’s *String Quartet No. 10*, composed earlier in the same year for the Kronos Quartet of San Francisco. The work consists of five movements arranged in an “arch” structure, whereby the first and last movements are closely related, as are the second and fourth. As an acknowledgement of the source of the commission, the composer based the first, third and fifth movements on motives and rhythms from Pueblo native American music. The first and last, marked *estatico*, begin in a mood of hushed but joyous excitement, succeeded by episodes of stringent syncopated rhythms. A contrast is provided in the second and fourth movements by two *Chorales*, rhythmically almost static but harmonically much more complex than the outer movements. The second chorale features a highly expressive viola line soaring above the violins. The central *Interlude* opens with a two–part texture of violas and celli, once again strongly rhythmic, which relaxes with the entry of the violins in a sort of descant.

Phillip Wilcher (1958–) is a Sydney–born musician who has acquired a great reputation as pianist and composer. Highlights to date include the publication in 1972 of his first piano composition (making him then the youngest published composer in Australia), a period of study with Dr. Franz Holford and an association of some thirty years with composer Miriam Hyde. He recently wrote a full scale recital for pianist Simon Tedeschi.

In Phillip's new work *1791* – the title being the year of Mozart's death – a lyrical cantilena for oboe is supported by gently murmuring strings, with occasional important contributions from a solo cello. The composer describes the background of the composition in the following words.

> "I'm fairly reclusive and rarely listen to music. At the time I wrote *1791*, I wasn't that consciously aware of the fact that it was the anniversary of Mozart's death. I knew it was, but what impelled me to write the piece was the lingering thoughts surrounding me after reading Maynard Solomon's biography of Mozart and what such a sense of loss must have felt like at the time of his passing – did the world's heart ache?
>
> I suppose it would be surprising to most musicians that I rarely listen to music, but on reflection, I would say the relaxation I crave through silence, as opposed to listening to music, lends a certain truth to what it is I do as a composer. I believe all music is conceived vocally, and over the years I have found myself constantly returning to the music of Bach and Chopin. I make the conscious decision now and then to go back to square one and start over. It's cleansing. I came to Mozart's music all too late in life – but then, perhaps not. I now know why it is that Chopin revered Mozart so. He had it all! Everything is so beautifully balanced and coordinated. I am struggling not to say that if Mozart was all there is, not just in music, but all genres of creativity, we would need little else. More recently I have been studying the quartets he wrote for Haydn. I'm perplexed by their beauty and craftsmanship. Less is more.

How he finishes them! – he just drops them in your lap with a wink of the eye! Looking at the printed score I had the crazy notion that if the notes that denote the sound were colours from a painter's brush, then these configurations by Mozart would be a painting possibly surpassing the greatness and grandeur of the Sistine Chapel ceiling. So, *1791* really marks the beginning of what's turning into a love affair for me. I have the feeling that for the rest of my days there will only ever be Mozart now. . . "

Aaron Copland wrote *Appalachian Spring* as a ballet for the renowned American choreographer Martha Graham. Its original incarnation as a thirty–minute ballet for flute, clarinet, bassoon, piano and small string ensemble was followed by a suite for the same forces, omitting the parts where music is subordinate to dance: this is the version which we perform today. A third setting, in which the music of the suite is scored for full symphony orchestra, is the best known version nowadays; nevertheless, the chamber version has a freshness and transparency which admirably express the mood of the ballet.

The ballet depicts a rural idyll at the beginning of the nineteenth century: a young farmer and his bride–to–be take their place in the community. The suite opens with a quiet dawn suggested by the lean lines of the woodwind and harmonic clusters of the strings. Suddenly piano and upper strings announce a wide ranging, leaping theme which after a time subsides into a quieter, sometimes harmonically complex section. Offbeat accents convey the impression of a sort of barn dance, which soon develops, however, into something much more rhythmically intricate. The opening music reappears as a brief introduction to the work's most famous section, a set of variations on a Shaker melody *The Gift to be Simple*. A coda, marked "like a prayer", sees the couple "left quiet and strong in their new house."

Rachel Tolmie, oboe and cor anglais

Rachel started playing the recorder and piano when she was four, and took up the oboe at age ten. She studied at the Conservatorium High School and then at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, where she completed her Bachelor of Music degree. In 1996 Rachel was awarded with distinction a Postgraduate Diploma in Performance as a solo/ensemble recitalist at the Royal College of Music, London.

As a soloist Rachel has appeared with the Balmain Sinfonia, the East–West Philharmonic Orchestra and the Central Coast Symphony Orchestra. She gives frequent recitals in music clubs around Sydney with associate artist John Martin, piano.

Currently, Rachel teaches at the Central Coast Conservatorium and is principal oboe of the Central Coast Symphony Orchestra. 2007 has seen the release of Rachel's new book, *An Introduction to the Cor Anglais and Oboe*. It comes with a CD *Simply, Cor Anglais*, featuring Rachel and John Martin.

Andrew Del Riccio, trumpet

Andrew Del Riccio is a well known Sydney trumpet player, teacher and conductor. He has performed with many leading Sydney ensembles including the Sydney Symphony and Opera Australia. He founded the Blues Point Brass Quintet, and also runs a heraldic fanfare ensemble which performs for corporate functions. Most recently, Andrew was spotted performing outside the Channel 7 studios with members of *The Chaser's War on Everything* cast, and at Lindsay Fox's 60th birthday parties.

Besides playing and teaching, Andrew is musical director of the Mosman Orchestra and has also guest conducted the Willoughby Symphony, North Sydney Symphony and Lane Cove Youth Orchestras. Outside of musical life, Andrew is an avid scuba diver, exploring wrecks and habitats of the NSW coast.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

Formed in 2001, the Bourbaki Ensemble is a string orchestra based at St. Stephen's Church, Newtown. The ensemble is strongly committed to playing music of the last hundred or so years, and in 2007 performs Australian music by George Palmer, Peter Sculthorpe, Phillip Wilcher and Christine McCombe.

Charles Denis Sauter Bourbaki (1816–1897) played an important role in the nineteenth–century French military. His internment in Switzerland during the Franco–Prussian War is commemorated by the *Bourbaki Panorama* at Lucerne. The Panorama was recently extended by the addition of the Bourbaki Restaurant, Bourbaki Kino and Bourbaki Glam Bar. It also houses the Bourbaki Library with its noteworthy collection of documents on authentic Ruritanian performance practice.

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

Violas Kathryn Ramsay, Dierdre Boyle, Janice Buttle, Kate Hughes.

Violoncellos Nicholas Thomas, Ian Macourt, Steve Meyer.

Bass Sasha Marker.

Flute Amanda Muir.

Clarinet Martin Brown.

Bassoon Christopher Bertram.

Piano Prue Gibbs.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

requiems for strings

Dmitri Shostakovich Requiem for Strings

Christine McCombe Of Distant Sadness

Herbert Howells Concerto for String Orchestra

2.30 pm, Sunday 14 October 2007

St. Stephen's Church, Newtown

Pieces by Shostakovich and Howells provide vastly different conceptions of a "requiem" for strings. The Shostakovich is a reflection of the composer's life under the oppressive Soviet regime, and unflinchingly expresses "the bitterness that has coloured my life grey". The Howells *Concerto* adopts in its slow movement a more elegiac and consolatory idiom; the two outer movements, on the contrary, are fine examples of clear and vigorous English string writing. A short piece by Melbourne composer Christine McCombe completes the programme.

St. Stephen's Church, designed by Edmund Blackett, is an outstanding example of colonial architecture. Both the church and its surrounding cemetery contain a multitude of fascinating reminiscences of Sydney's history. The church is also a superb venue for chamber and small orchestral music. This poignant programme, performed in the church's glorious acoustic, makes up a concert you will not want to miss!

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

Programme details subject to change