THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

mountains, forest, sea: music for strings

Schoenberg Verklärte Nacht

Mark Oliveiro Cyan Echo II

Andrew Schultz Willow Bend

Diana Burrell Das Meer, das so gross und weit ist

Steve Meyer, cello

David Angell, conductor

2.30 p.m., Sunday 8 March, 2009

St. Stephen's Church, Newtown

Welcome to another year of exciting and innovative music–making from the Bourbaki Ensemble! In 2009 we shall present no fewer than three premiere performances of Australian compositions. Today we are delighted to introduce to you Mark Oliveiro's *Cyan Echo II*, a concerto for cello and strings written especially for the Bourbaki Ensemble and soloist Steve Meyer. Mark's work augments the solo cello and string orchestra with electronic techniques in order to evoke the echoing clifflines of the Blue Mountains.

Before our musical tour of the Blue Mountains, we begin today's concert with *Das Meer, das so gross und weit ist*, a thrilling seascape by contemporary British composer Diana Burrell. *Das Meer...* commences with the irregular crashing of waves upon a rocky shore before easing into a slower section which suggests the limitless expanse of a calm late afternoon sea. In a change of scene we present Andrew Schultz's *Willow Bend*, inspired by a quiet corner of the Wollongong Botanic Gardens. Our concert finishes with the dark forest setting of Schoenberg's masterpiece *Transfigured Night*.

In 2009, as usual, the Bourbaki Ensemble will present three programmes. The second will be given both at St. Stephen's and at Macquarie University, and will feature Dvořák's magnificent *Serenade for Strings* – see the back cover of this programme for more information. For our November concert we will be joined by acclaimed trombonist Greg van der Struik in a programme of (mainly) music from countries bordering the Baltic Sea. There will be a trombone concertino by Lars–Erik Larsson (Sweden); a folk–based suite by Einojuhani Rautavaara (Finland), often considered Sibelius' greatest successor; and music by Erkki–Sven Tüür (Estonia) and Andrzej Panufnik (Poland). Full details can be found on the Bourbaki Ensemble website at `users.tpg.com.au/ddangell`.

PROGRAMME

Diana Burrell

Das Meer, das so gross und weit ist,
da wimmelt's ohne Zahl grosse und kleine Tiere

Andrew Schultz

Willow Bend

Mark Oliveiro

Cyan Echo II for cello, strings and electronics

Steve Meyer, cello

INTERVAL
20 minutes

Arnold Schoenberg

Verklärte Nacht
(composer's 1943 version for string orchestra)

In that the British have always taken pride in their status as an island nation and in their relationship with the sea, it is not surprising that we find numerous evocations of the sea in British art. To mention only twentieth century music, there are works such as Ralph Vaughan Williams' *Sea Symphony*; Benjamin Britten's opera *Peter Grimes*, in which the sea all but assumes the role of a character in the drama; and Grace Williams' Welsh–inspired *Sea Sketches*, performed by the Bourbaki Ensemble in 2005. A recent addition to this catalogue is the composition of **Diana Burrell**, *Das Meer, das so gross und weit ist, da wimmelt's ohne Zahl grosse und kleine Tiere*. The lengthy title, taken from Martin Luther's German translation of Psalm 104, may be rendered as "The Sea, which is so great and wide, wherein teem innumerable creatures both great and small".

Das Meer crashes straight into an opening impression of surging waves; with the material shared between first and second violins, the effect is of tides sweeping in irregularly from different directions and colliding with one another. Violas contribute a rhythmically complex evocation of seabirds crying raucously above the turmoil of cellos and basses. After a tumultuous climax involving indeterminate pitches in violins and violas and mighty *glissandi* in the basses, the work settles into a slower and more lyrical mood. Four solo violins in their highest register depict the extensive sand flats glistening in the late afternoon light: no doubt a familiar sight to the composer, for Burrell, as was Britten, is a native of the low–lying coastal regions of East Anglia.

As the solo lines fade into silence, the *tutti* first violins introduce a new theme with an intense clarity and purity of character. It is echoed, one by one, in the other sections of the orchestra and develops into a fugue. The music very gradually gathers pace until it reaches a reprise of the climax involving indeterminate pitch and *glissandi*. The fugue theme is given to the celli, then basses, accompanied by seabird sounds in violins and violas, before a brief return to the mood and tempo of the opening and a glorious final *crescendo*.

Diana Burrell was born in 1948 and began her musical career as a freelance violist and teacher. It was 1980 before she began to make her name as a composer, first of all with her *Missa Sancte Endeliente*, written for the St Endellion Festival in Cornwall and employing both Cornish and Latin texts. Since then she has composed numerous orchestral works, concertos for viola, clarinet and flute, chamber and choral music. *Das Meer* is an exemplar of her stated aim as a composer to produce "strong, rough–edged things, brave disrespectful shapes and sounds".

Born in Adelaide in 1960, **Andrew Schultz** moved with his family to Brisbane at the age of 10. After learning the clarinet at school he turned to composition, undertaking tertiary and postgraduate studies in Queensland, the USA and the UK, where his teachers included such eminent composers as Colin Brumby, David Lumsdaine, George Crumb and Luciano Berio. He has since held positions at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London and the School of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong; at the beginning of this year he was appointed Professor of Music at the University of New South Wales.

Andrew's compositions range over a wide variety of genres, including orchestral, chamber, vocal and dramatic works. A prominent artistic concern is the interaction between indigenous and European Australians, explored in works such as the cantata *Journey to Horseshoe Bend* and the opera *Black River*. The former was premiered in Sydney in 2003 to an overwhelming public and critical response. It combines Bach chorale melodies with English, German and Aranda texts in telling the story of the final days of missionary Carl Strehlow, as documented by his son T.G.H. Strehlow, an anthropologist and pioneering investigator of Central Australian music. The performance was released as a CD by ABC Classics; other recordings of Andrew's compositions include two discs of chamber music (Tall Poppies) and one of choral pieces (The Song Company).

Willow Bend originated as an orchestral piece, written in 1994 for the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra. The string version dates from 2004 and was premiered by the Wollongong–based Steel City Strings. The work celebrates early morning walks taken in the Wollongong Botanic Gardens by Andrew and his wakeful infant son Konrad, which often ended at a beautiful spot known as "Willow Bend". Scored for strings in nine or more parts, the piece begins with a quiet but angular line in the violas (perhaps mimicking the bumpy motion of Konrad's stroller). Out of a hazy mist of violins emerge quiet thematic fragments, generally rising in contour, at first in the fourth violin part but thereafter often shared between different sections. A change of mood introduces a theme of narrower range with an arpeggiated *pizzicato* accompaniment, followed by a brief recapitulation of the opening themes. *Willow Bend* ends slowly and quietly as Konrad, we trust, finally drifts into sleep.

The Bourbaki Ensemble is delighted to present in this concert a new work by **Mark Oliveiro**, an outstanding young composer with local connections. Born in 1983, Mark studied at Newtown High School for the Performing Arts; two of his teachers from those years are now regular members of the Bourbaki Ensemble! In 2001 and 2002 he received great acclaim for a number of compositions written during or soon after his HSC year, particularly the work *Images for Bird*, which was published in the 2002 HSC Standards Booklet as an example of high standard work. After the HSC Mark proceeded to study composition at the Sydney Conservatorium, and upon graduation commenced a Master's course at the University of Indiana. During this period his works were performed by notable Australian ensembles including Orchestra Victoria and the Greenway Quartet, and at workshops and festivals in Latvia, Germany and Italy. Currently, Mark has returned to Sydney for a short time before resuming his studies at Indiana. While here he has been working on projects with the Song Company and Chronology Arts, and he enjoys regular engagements as a DJ.

Mark's main compositional interests are connected with electronic music, specifically with the combination of electronics and human performance. In *Cyan Echo II*, a concerto for cello, strings and live electronics, the soloist's music is picked up and modified by electronic means before being returned to the performance venue through loudspeakers. The devices employed include looping, reverberation, real-time harmonization, granular synthesis and feedback delay. A pre-recorded track, featuring manipulated cello samples, also forms part of the ensemble.

The application of electronics in this piece is primarily a means of expanding the variety of timbres available from the solo cello, enabling it to evoke the sound world of the great cliffs and valleys near Katoomba in the Blue Mountains. The composer writes:

> "I have a fond memory of standing at the brink of the Jamieson Valley in the Blue Mountains, shouting at the Three Sisters on the other side, listening to the muffled, distorted repetitions of my vocalisations boomeranging their way in return. I would do this for ages, as long as my parents could stand it."

So the work begins with the solo cello announcing a series of static chords like the great rock walls of the mountains, prolonged by electronically generated echoes; later sections require the soloist to soar above the orchestra like a bird in flight, or to tumble down dramatically like a waterfall. The electronic effects and the predominantly static orchestral parts surround these lines with an atmospheric halo like dense cloud shrouding the landscape. Frequent forceful interjections from the double basses suggest mysterious rocky outcrops hidden from sight deep in the mist. At a later stage of the concerto elegiac motifs from the cello are freely echoed in the violas, while toward the end a foundation is provided for the work by a series of heavy, march–like episodes on the pre–recorded track. The last of these fades into silence beneath the soloist's lamenting, resonant phrases.

The place of the natural world in musical composition is a fascinating study. Early composers were fond of including in their music the sounds of birdsong and other direct imitations of nature: Vivaldi's violin and flute concertos abound in such moments, and Beethoven famously includes in his *Pastoral* Symphony the carefully notated sounds of nightingale, cuckoo and quail. Beethoven, however, actually described this symphony as "more an expression of feeling than a painting", and thus led the way for composers of the Romantic period in emphasizing the effects of nature upon the human psyche and placing less importance on the recreation of specific sounds. In the music of Schubert (*Winterreise*), Berlioz (*Symphonie Fantastique*, slow movement) and Tchaikovsky (*Manfred*), evocations of nature serve a vital purpose in reflecting the characters' state of mind.

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, Freud's psychoanalytical ideas began to gain an important place in composers' imaginations. Often the environment took on a threatening rather than a sympathetic aspect, by implication revealing the hero's nightmarish inner world, and this led to such works of musical expressionism as *Erwartung* by **Arnold Schoenberg** (1874–1951), a monodrama whose single character stumbles at night through a dark forest and encounters the dead body of her lover, whom she believes she may have murdered.

Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht* ("Transfigured Night") was written in its original version at the very end of the nineteenth century (1899), a decade or more before the full emergence of expressionism, and the oppressive gloom of its nocturnal forest setting still leaves room for eventual resolution under the radiance of a silvery moon. The work takes as its scenario a poem by Richard Dehmel, in which a man and a woman walk together at night. The woman confesses that she is pregnant by another man, but as the music progresses he proposes to accept the child as his own, so that it will transfigure the couple's love.

The psychological aspects of this tale are illustrated by constantly varying textures and harmonies. The work opens with the dark timbre of violas and cellos playing in their lowest register, and very gradually allows a higher and brighter tessitura to predominate. The final paragraph places a lucent first violin theme above shimmering second violins and violas, with cellos and basses contributing gently articulated *pizzicato* chords. The harmony is based on that of Wagner, at times extending it almost to breaking point ("as if someone had smeared the score of *Tristan* while the ink was still wet," said a critic) and verging on the atonality of Schoenberg's next decade; yet some of the most tense, almost hysterical sections resolve abruptly into passages of expansive and richly scored major–key harmonies. In the course of its half–hour span, *Verklärte Nacht* travels a path from darkness, guilt and fear to light, hope and reconciliation.

David Angell, conductor

David has been playing viola for many years with some of the best known non–professional orchestras in Australia, including the Australian Youth Orchestra, Melbourne Youth Orchestra, and community orchestras in and around Sydney. As a violist and chorister he has performed for internationally famous conductors including Sir Charles Mackerras, Stuart Challender and Richard Bonynge.

David took up conducting in 1998 with a highly successful season of *West Side Story* for Holroyd Musical and Dramatic Society. In February 2001 he assembled the Bourbaki Ensemble and conducted its inaugural performance, featuring works by Sculthorpe, Debussy, Mahler and Dvořák. Since December 2002 David has also been the conductor of Orchestra 143, a classical chamber orchestra based in Turramurra.

Steve Meyer, cello

Steven Meyer began playing cello while studying flute at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. After working as a flute player for Opera Australia and various Sydney ensembles, Steve commenced formal cello studies with Susan Blake in 2004. He completed a Diploma of Music in 2006, graduating with a distinction in cello performance. As a chamber musician Steve regularly performs with the Stables Quartet and has performed for the Governor of NSW and the 21 world leaders of the 2007 APEC forum. He has performed in masterclasses for Alexander Ivashkin, Theodore Kuchar and members of the Takacs, Australian and Jerusalem Quartets and the Eggner Trio. Steve is a longstanding member of the Bourbaki Ensemble, and frequently appears as a flautist and cellist with contemporary vocal duo Halcyon. He currently teaches chamber music at the Conservatorium High School.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

With this concert we begin the ninth year of Bourbaki Ensemble concerts in Newtown. As ever, the Ensemble seeks both to perform the great works of the string orchestra repertoire and to introduce to our audiences exciting but lesser known music. Our commitment to supporting Australian composers continues in 2009 with performances of music by Mark Oliveiro, Andrew Schultz, Phillip Wilcher and Greg van der Struik.

General Charles Denis Sauter Bourbaki (1816–1897) was well known in French artistic circles as a profoundly original thinker on music. As recently as 2004, his correspondence with the eminent English physicist Michael Faraday, speculating on the potential of the latter's electromagnetic researches to facilitate the development and modification of musical instruments, was edited and published in a special non–subscription issue of the scholarly journal *Communications in the History of Science and Music*.

Violins Alastair Duff–Forbes, Kathryn Crossing, Clare Blakemore, Paul Hoskinson, Greta Lee, Emlyn Lewis–Jones, Froukje Werlemann–Godfrey, Justin White, Richard Willgoss.

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

Violoncellos Nicholas Comino, Steve Meyer, Laura Hitchcock, Ian Macourt, Nicholas Thomas.

Basses Sasha Marker, Caitlin Cahill, Mark Szeto.

Live electronics Mark Oliveiro, Michael Oliveiro.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

serenades and elegies: music for strings

Dvořák Serenade for Strings
Mendelssohn String Symphony No. 7
Phillip Wilcher Into His Countenance
Elgar Elegy for Strings
Phillip Wilcher The Flautist's Pavane

2.30 pm, Sunday 26 July 2009
Macquarie Theatre, Macquarie University
Admission free

2.30 pm, Sunday 2 August 2009
St. Stephen's Church, Newtown
Tickets $20, concessions $15

Guest flautist Amanda Muir gives the world premieres of Phillip Wilcher's *The Flautist's Pavane* and *Into His Countenance*. The latter, written in memory of the composer's mother, was recorded by Amanda last year and released on the Bourbaki Ensemble CD *Mozart in Love*. Elgar's expressively sombre *Elegy* for string orchestra is among the finest of his shorter works.

Featuring vivacious Czech rhythms, enticing melodies and an elegant waltz, Dvořák's *Serenade* is one of that composer's masterpieces, and arguably the best loved string work of the nineteenth century. The concert begins with the seventh of the dozen or so astonishingly accomplished string symphonies by the teenaged Felix Mendelssohn.

Further information 0433824553 or `users.tpg.com.au/ddangell`
Programme details subject to change