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

Amanda Muir, flute

David Angell, conductor

2.30 p.m., Sunday 26 July, 2009

Macquarie Theatre, Macquarie University

2.30 p.m., Sunday 2 August, 2009

St. Stephen's Church, Newtown

Welcome to this year's second Bourbaki Ensemble concert! We are delighted to have the opportunity to give our programme of "serenades and elegies" both at Newtown and at Macquarie University. Our thanks to all at St. Stephen's for their generosity in allowing us to perform in the church, and to Philippa Borland for organising the Macquarie performance.

1809 was a year of musical significance for two reasons: the birth of Felix Mendelssohn and the death of Joseph Haydn. The Bourbaki Ensemble contributes to Mendelssohn's bicentenary celebrations with a performance of one of his precocious string symphonies. (For Haydn, see `www.orchestra143.org`, and keep 27 September free!) The serenade in our programme's title is Dvořák's Op. 22, one of the works performed at the very first Bourbaki concert in February 2001; the elegies are by Elgar and Phillip Wilcher. Phillip's *Into His Countenance* is a moving work written in memory of the composer's mother. We also give the world premiere performances of a *Pavane* written by Phillip earlier this year: both pieces are scored for flute and strings, and feature guest soloist Amanda Muir.

All the information anyone could possibly want about the Bourbaki Ensemble (as well as much that you probably don't want) is to be found on our website. Please note that we now have our own web address `www.bourbakiensemble.org` which replaces our previous "generic" address. The website contains contact information, details of past and future performances, programme notes from A to Z (actually, only as yet from B to W) and an indispensible guide to the life and times of General Bourbaki. Furthermore, we now have enough space to provide recordings of past performances. We intend to change these from time to time: currently available is Mark Oliveiro's *Cyan Echo II*, written especially for Bourbaki and cellist Steve Meyer and premiered at our March 2009 concert. Listen and enjoy!

PROGRAMME

Felix Mendelssohn Symphony for Strings No. 7 in D minor

I Allegro
II Andante
III Menuetto
IV Allegro molto

Sir Edward Elgar Elegy, Op. 58

Phillip Wilcher Into His Countenance

Amanda Muir, flute

INTERVAL
20 minutes

Phillip Wilcher The Flautist's Pavane

Amanda Muir, flute

Antonín Dvořák Serenade for Strings in E major, Op. 22

I Moderato
II Tempo di valse
III Scherzo: vivace
IV Larghetto
V Finale: allegro vivace

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 both demonstrates what he has learned from the great composers of previous generations and gives hints of his own mature style. The seventh of the symphonies was probably written in the middle of 1822, when Mendelssohn was just thirteen years old.

Throughout musical history composers have employed various means of organising large–scale movements. For composers of the classical period one of the most important means was *sonata form*, which developed into an unsurpassed way of integrating diverse elements into a coherent whole and thereby creating a dramatic structure of conflict and resolution. A movement in sonata form essentially consists of three parts: the *exposition*, in which two contrasting musical subjects are presented in different keys; the *development*, which affords the composer the opportunity to demonstrate his skill in bringing out the potentialities of his themes; and the *recapitulation*, in which the two subjects are restated, this time in the same key. Lest this sound like a rigid formal scheme leaving no room for the creative impulse, it must be stressed that sonata form was a far more flexible device than this brief outline might suggest, and in the hands of a great composer would often vary considerably from its "textbook" format.

The first movement of Mendelssohn's seventh symphony is a particularly clear example of sonata form, and careful listening should make its outlines clear even if you have no previous acquaintance with sonata form. The first subject itself alternates two contrasting ideas, a vigorous arpeggio figure for the full orchestra being immediately succeeded by a plaintive response. After a series of *fortissimo* arpeggios there appears the second subject, its soft, tranquil lines in the violins poised above shorter notes in the lower instruments. Further references to the arpeggios of the first subject conclude the exposition, which after a brief silence is repeated verbatim (in case you missed anything!) before leading into the development section. This begins with a variant of the second subject, after which Mendelssohn introduces references to the arpeggios from the first subject. When at last the arpeggios are answered by their original "plaintive" response, we have reached the recapitulation. The first subject is followed by the second, the second by a brief *coda* (concluding section) in a slightly faster tempo, as the movement comes to a forceful and exciting close.

If the first movement suggests the music of Beethoven or late Mozart, the second is purely Mendelssohn's own. The gentle melodic opening in the treble register (in this case, violins alone without violas, celli or bass) is one of the earliest examples of a style which the composer was still employing in the chorus for unaccompanied women's voices "Lift thine eyes" from the oratorio *Elijah*, written only a year or so before his death. In the symphony the lower instruments are gradually added to the orchestral texture, and a darker–hued second section ensues, grounded upon a regular pulsation in the cellos.

The minuet takes us back to the world of Beethoven, the twisting semiquavers of the first phrases recalling that composer's F minor string quartet. As is customary, the minuet is contrasted with a trio section; perhaps Beethoven's *Eroica* was an inspiration for Mendelssohn's lightly dancing scales. The finale begins with a couple of abrupt chords before a quiet murmuring (Schubert's *Erlkönig*?) bursts into an exciting *forte*. This comes to an abrupt end as a fugue begins in the violas, followed by second violins. The manner in which the composer combines the fugue with more homophonic material suggests that he may have been studying Mozart's Symphony No. 41. The movement continues with fugue and sonata textures, sometimes together, sometimes alternating; eventually the scoring thins out to nothing before the full orchestra crashes back in, quickly bringing to a conclusion this remarkable symphony.

England's first great native composer since the seventeenth century, **Sir Edward Elgar** (1857–1934) was an intensely private person who occupied, somewhat against his inclination, one of the most prominent positions in English musical establishment. Against his inclination, perhaps, though not against his will: for the humbly–born Elgar always craved the recognition which society eventually bestowed upon him in the form of a knighthood, membership of the Order of Merit, appointment as Master of the King's Musick and, three years before his death, a baronetcy. Elgar's compositions reflect the duality in his nature. Works such as the *Pomp and Circumstance* marches and the *Coronation Ode* for Edward VII are typical of the "public" Elgar, while in many of his later works the composer, distressed by the horrors of the First World War and feeling out of place in the society that succeeded it, seems to retreat into his own emotional world.

The *Elegy* for string orchestra, composed in 1909 at a time when the composer was also occupied with the Violin Concerto, is one of the most intimate and personal of Elgar's shorter works. Muted strings express a mood of profound sorrow in narrowly shifting violin/viola harmonies set over the steady tread of cellos and bass, a feeling enhanced by continual hesitant modifications of tempo. A firmer melodic line takes over as the movement proceeds, but it is not long before the opening temper returns. The final bars, though turning, almost reluctantly, to a major key, offer but scant consolation.

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 today's concert we present two works by Phillip for flute and string orchestra. *Into His Countenance* was written in 2005 and is dedicated to the memory of the composer's mother. For much of the work the solo flute is supported by gently rocking figures for first and second violins, with violas now and then supplying a secondary melodic line. There are also important parts for solo cello and violin, the latter notably in a cadenza, shared with the flute, which provides the work's central section.

Although the harmony in Phillip's work never really strays far from traditional precepts, he is far more concerned with melodic aspects of his music; if the separate parts retain their individual integrity, he is perfectly happy to allow occasional harmonic clashes. These are so subtle that listeners will probably not consciously register any dissonance, but the overall effect is to create a kind of disembodied atmosphere, which refuses to remain earthbound and which admirably accomplishes the composer's stated intention to portray his mother's soul moving towards the countenance of God.

The Flautist's Pavane, completed in early 2009, is an expansion of a piece originally written for flute and piano. Both the piano and the string orchestra versions were composed for today's soloist, Amanda Muir. The pavane is an old dance form, the alternative term *padovana* indicating an origin in the town of Padova (Padua) near Venice, which gained a certain renewed popularity when it attracted the attention of twentieth–century composers such as Ravel (*Pavane pour une Infante défunte*) and Fauré. In Phillip Wilcher's *Flautist's Pavane* the soloist is sometimes paired with melodic counterpoints in the strings, sometimes supported by a sighing chordal accompaniment.

First among Czech composers, **Antonín Dvořák** (1841–1904) was born in the village of Nelahozeves, where his father was a butcher and innkeeper. An early interest in music led to studies in Zlonice and then Prague, where he played viola in the Czech National Opera orchestra. Dvořák's early compositions were influenced by Wagner, but of far greater moment was the encouragement and patronage of Brahms, who succeeded in placing Dvořák's *Slavonic Dances* with Brahms' own publisher. The popularity of this music led to an increasing reputation in western Europe, and particularly in England, where Dvořák was a frequent and welcome visitor. (The three nineteenth–century composers on today's programme share an association with the Birmingham Triennial Festival: Mendelssohn's *Elijah* was premiered there in 1846; Dvořák's *Spectre's Bride* and *Requiem* in 1885 and 1891; Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius* in 1900.) A stay in America was perhaps less happy, but did result in the composition of such masterpieces as the *New World* Symphony and the cello concerto. One of Dvořák's keenest extra–musical enthusiasms was railways; he died from the after–effects of a chill brought about by excessive outdoor engine–spotting in cold weather during the spring of 1904.

Dvořák's *Serenade*, one of the best loved pieces in the string orchestra repertoire, is a work of few shadows. An introductory movement in the "bright" key of E major begins with brief thematic fragments which gradually coalesce into more sustained melody, the whole bound together by an almost constant pulsation in the violas; a change of key brings a more dance–like section suggesting the folk music of Dvořák's native Bohemia. The second movement, *tempo di valse*, occasionally adopts dotted rhythms which are decidedly more Czech than Viennese; attractive use is made of the vibrant tone of violas in their lowest register.

There follows a scherzo, in duple time rather than the customary triple, which features a good deal of imitation between the parts. Celli are echoed by first violins, violins by violas, second violins by firsts, and so on throughout a large part of the scherzo. After a central section in which a singing violin melody is accompanied by suave offbeat figures from the violas, the scherzo returns, slightly varied. The fourth movement, *larghetto*, introduces a relaxed and somewhat nostalgic mood, full of charm, if lacking the depth of feeling to be found in the slow movements of Dvořák's later symphonies. The movement features a contrasting episode in a somewhat more urgent vein, proceeding to a recapitulation of the *larghetto*, which expands into a hushed and almost motionless ending.

The finale begins with further imitative writing; twice the piece stops and waits, as it were, for one half of the orchestra to catch up with the other. A feature of the opening is the series of accents falling on the last quaver of each bar and disrupting the expected melodic flow. The main theme from the fourth movement and the close of the first are recalled before the Serenade ends with a return to the syncopations and offbeat accents typical of the finale.

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. In 2002 David co–wrote and conducted the soundtrack for the film *Compost Monster*, which has been screened in Sydney and in London. He is the editor of a revised score of the *Concerto for Strings* by Margaret Sutherland, and has contributed translations of Russian and Italian poetry to the Lied and Art Song Texts website.

Amanda Muir, flute

Amanda Muir began her music career as a pianist at the Canberra School of Music under the tutelage of the Danish pianist John Winther. After a change of direction in which she spent ten years working overseas in the marketing and finance industries, she returned to Sydney to undertake a Bachelor of Music Performance degree in Flute at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, which she completed with honours in 2000.

Amanda played principal flute with the Willoughby Symphony Orchestra for two years, plays associate principal flute and piccolo with the Ku–Ring–Gai Philharmonic and is a casual with the Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra while teaching flute and ensemble studies at several schools.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

The Bourbaki Ensemble has been giving concerts in Newtown since 2001. Members of the Ensemble love exploring the masterpieces of the string orchestra repertoire, both the familiar and the unjustly neglected, and keenly support Australian composers.

General Charles Denis Sauter Bourbaki (1816–1897), a figure of considerable importance in nineteenth–century French military circles, was also a passionate follower of the arts, music in particular. In later years he was fond of recalling the impression made upon him by the premiere of Mendelssohn's *Elijah* at Birmingham in 1846. It is distinctly odd that Bourbaki's musical acquaintances of the 1840s apparently remained unaware of the visit. The matter is clouded, or perhaps clarified, by the absence in military archives of any record of leave granted to Bourbaki at this time. Some scholars have surmised that in 1846, for the first and only time in his career, Bourbaki went AWOL, led astray by his enthusiasm for Mendelssohn's great oratorio, and that he was therefore unable to discuss the matter without putting himself in danger of a court–martial.

Violins Emlyn Lewis–Jones, Kathryn Crossing, Clare Blakemore, Greta Lee, Deborah McGowan, Froukje Werlemann–Godfrey, Justin White, Richard Willgoss.

Violas Kathryn Ramsay, William d'Avigdor, Derek Davies, Kate Hughes.

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

Bass Sasha Marker.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

shores of the Baltic: music for strings

Einojuhani Rautavaara Fiddlers
Errki–Sven Tüür Insula Deserta
Greg van der Struik Piangi
Valentin Silvestrov Zwei Dialoge mit Nachwort
Sir Andrzej Panufnik Divertimento for Strings
Lars–Erik Larsson Concertino for Trombone
Erik Sköld Adagio

Greg van der Struik, trombone
David Angell, conductor

2.30 pm, Sunday 29 November 2009
St. Stephen's Church, Newtown

In our third and final concert for 2009 we perform music (mostly) from nations bordering the Baltic Sea. Rautavaara's *Fiddlers* evokes Finnish folk music; Tüür's *Insula Deserta* creates a much more insubstantial atmosphere, bringing to mind Shakespeare's "Be not afeard: the isle is full of noises". Silvestrov recomposes fragments of Schubert and Wagner, while Panufnik pays homage to Polish eighteenth–century chamber music. Guest soloist Greg van der Struik will perform a *Concertino* by Sweden's leading twentieth–century composer, and a work of his own, *Piangi*, inspired by a visit to northern France around Anzac Day 2005.

Further information 0433074322 or www.bourbakiensemble.org
Programme details subject to change