THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE
TUCANA FLUTE QUARTET

music for flutes and strings

James Wilson Concerto for Four Flutes and Strings

Percy Grainger Irish Tune from County Derry

Christopher Willcock Divertimento: Nolan's Backyard

Rachel Holstead (Can't) have your cake and eat it

Charles Ives The Unanswered Question

Hamilton Harty In Ireland

Diane Berger, Lisa Breckenridge,
Christine Draeger, Rosamund Plummer, flutes

David Angell, conductor

2.30 pm, Sunday 21 February, 2010

St. Stephen's Church, Newtown

Welcome to the Bourbaki Ensemble's tenth year! Our season begins with special guests the Tucana Flute Quartet and a programme showcasing Irish music. Subsequent concerts this year will be held on 25 July, 1 August and 5 December: for full details see the back cover and `www.bourbakiensemble.org`.

I'm often asked where Bourbaki repertoire comes from. Well, today's concert originated with the desire to perform *The Unanswered Question* – just because it's great music! Needing four flutes for the Ives, I immediately thought to ask Christine Draeger if Tucana would like to take part. Christine was instantly enthusiastic and suggested that we might also programme a concerto for the four flutes and strings. I wasn't even sure if there was such a thing – they certainly aren't ten a penny – but after a bit of research Christine came up with the James Wilson. We managed to get a preview of the concerto from the Irish Contemporary Music Centre and after some consideration decided to go ahead. This turned our thoughts in the direction of Irish music: Christine mentioned her arrangement of Harty's *In Ireland*, and as a result of browsing the CMC website I found Rachel Holstead's *(Can't) have your cake and eat it*. How can you go past a title like that? Rachel was kind enough to send a score for perusal; not only was it immediately engaging, but every time I read it I found more points of interest. To me this is one of the infallible hallmarks of a first–class score. It was in. Christopher Willcock's *Divertimento* was a piece I had heard on an ABC Classic FM broadcast, and while any specific connections with the rest of the programme were at best tenuous, I felt strongly that in some undefinable way it fitted in. The Grainger, besides being a beautiful and popular work, was perfect for drawing together all the strands of the programme: an Irish tune, set by an Australian/American composer. We hope you enjoy all the pieces and appreciate the links between them.

PROGRAMME

Rachel Holstead (Can't) have your cake and eat it

Percy Grainger Irish Tune from County Derry

James Wilson Concerto for Four Flutes and String Orchestra, Op. 73

1. Spiritoso
2. Malinconoso
3. Ballabile

Tucana Flute Quartet

INTERVAL

20 minutes

Hamilton Harty *In Ireland*, transcribed for flute quartet by Christine Draeger

Tucana Flute Quartet

Charles Ives The Unanswered Question

Tucana Flute Quartet
Nicholas Reefman, trumpet

Christopher Willcock Divertimento: Nolan's Backyard, for string orchestra

1. Night Ride
2. Earth Song
3. River Run

Rachel Holstead (born 1978) is a composer from the region of Corca Dhuibhne in the southwest corner of Ireland. Her music, including both instrumental and electronic works, draws inspiration from many sources, and she has expressed her compositional ethos thus:

> "I do not want my music to be confined to what is considered beautiful within any one style or culture. I always compose as a listener, and constantly question whether the music leads the ear or leaves it behind."

Rachel has gained a PhD in composition from Queen's University, Belfast, and has written music for ensembles including the Irish Baroque Orchestra, the RTÉ Vanbrugh Quartet, and the Irish Chamber Orchestra. She has received commissions from the Irish national broadcaster RTÉ and from the BBC.

(Can't) have your cake and eat it was written for the Irish Chamber Orchestra in 2006. The composer has described how the piece developed into its final form.

> "It started out as 'have your cake and eat it' and gained and lost the 'Can't' several times. On good days, there's no 'Can't'. On not–so–good days, it's there in bold type. The brackets are a compromise, life *can* be that good but don't get too comfortable. . . "

The work opens with immense excitement and energy, featuring exuberant passages in the upper parts and intricate metrical variation. There follows a quiet and eerie section where the musicians are instructed to play with a very superficial sound; this leads into a complex and somewhat mechanical episode suggesting the frustration of a "not–so–good day". After a brief silence the composer introduces an extraordinary texture of quiet, widely spread chords for basses, violas and first violins; there are also brief cadenzas for viola and for cello. The final part of *(Can't) have your cake and eat it* is initiated by a stunning and unexpected return to the opening figures, and once again expresses a mood of optimism and energy – though not without the occasional interruption. Don't get too comfortable...

Born in Australia, **Percy Grainger** (1882–1961) spent most of his life overseas, performing and teaching in Europe and the United States. In 1918 he became an American citizen, but he always felt his Australian origins to be an important influence on his character and music. It appears that he had some intention late in life of returning to Australia permanently, but this was prevented by a combination of professional commitments, ill health and the possibility of adverse financial effects.

Anecdotes abound of Grainger's unconventional behaviour. He was married in 1928 on stage at the Hollywood Bowl, before an audience of some 20000. The ceremony was the culmination of a concert at which, as a tribute to his bride Ella Ström, Grainger had conducted his recent composition *To a Nordic Princess*. In the following year, a visit to the ageing composer Frederick Delius – in Grainger's esteem second only to Grieg – must have been like the irruption of a tornado.

> "Grainger would dash from one room to another, and, bouncing down the staircase in two jumps, fly through the doorway in mid–air and land with a crash beside Delius's carriage halfway across the yard; the old man would shake his head and say that he really could not bear it."
>
> Eric Fenby, *Delius as I Knew Him*.

Like many other composers of the early twentieth century, Grainger was actively engaged in collecting, transcribing and publishing folk music. Many of his own compositions exhibit the strong influence of English and Scandinavian folk song. Irish music was less of an interest of Grainger's, but his setting of the *Irish Tune from County Derry*, better known to listeners as *O Danny Boy*, is much admired. It was among the first of Grainger's works to be published.

James Wilson, born in London in 1922, was a relative latecomer to composition, beginning formal studies only after World War II, in which he served in the Royal Navy. Shortly thereafter he took up residence in Ireland, where he lived until his death in 2005. As professor of composition in the Royal Irish Academy of Music and director of a prestigious annual summer school for composers, he occupied an important place in Irish musical life. His compositions include an opera on *Twelfth Night*, and six others; many songs and chamber works; and twelve concertos, including the 1978 *Concerto for Four Flutes and String Orchestra*.

The concerto consists of three movements in the traditional fast–slow–fast form. The first, *spiritoso*, is in the main a lightly accompanied confection of virtuosic scales, trills and flourishes for the soloists; an occasional more serene episode serves to vary the mood. Wilson's characteristically astringent harmonies are to be heard in the orchestral opening to the second movement, *malinconoso*. The music passes through more agitated sections before ending quietly and mysteriously. The finale bears the unusual designation *ballabile*, "dance–like", though the sometimes irregular rests in the main theme might well upset the coordination of a less than skillful dancer! In a surprise ending, the orchestral accompaniment at first begins to "freeze" beneath the soloists' dance; eventually a slower, almost ritualistic, texture overtakes the whole score, with just a couple of dance–like flutterings at the very end.

His life pursuing the opposite trajectory to that of our previous composer, **Hamilton Harty** (1879–1941) was born in County Down, northern Ireland, but from his early twenties was based in England. He is best remembered as a conductor, and in particular for his tenure with the Hallé Orchestra from 1920 to 1933. He also worked extensively with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in the 1930s, and his performances in Australia in 1934 served as a catalyst for the creation of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. Harty was knighted in 1925.

Despite his busy conducting career, Hamilton Harty always managed to allocate a significant amount of his time to composition and arrangement. His *John Field Suite* and his transcription of movements from Handel's *Water Music* are his most frequently performed works, but he also compiled a long list of original compositions. Prominent among these is a group inspired by Irish history and culture, including *An Irish Symphony*, a tone poem *With the Wild Geese* and the fantasy *In Ireland*. At the top of the score of the latter the composer has written, "In a Dublin street at dusk, two wandering street musicians are playing". The work was composed originally for flute and piano, and later recast in an orchestral version with solo flute and harp. Christine Draeger has used elements of both versions in her arrangement of *In Ireland* for piccolo, flute, alto flute and bass flute.

Progress in music often refuses to respect strict chronology. Much of the music composed by **Charles Ives** (1874–1954) in the early twentieth century could easily be placed almost a century later by the uninformed but perceptive listener. Ives delighted in constructing "collages" in which unrelated musical strands, often familiar items such as marches or hymn tunes, appear simultaneously. His thinking on music, and on life, was strongly influenced by the New England philosophers: his piano sonata *Concord, Massachusetts, 1840–1860* is something like a portrait gallery of the main figures in the transcendentalist movement. Though little performed in his early years, he came to be recognised as the first truly great American composer.

Ives wrote a large number of pieces for chamber orchestras of various kinds. Some are pictorial or dramatic in intent – *The Gong on the Hook and Ladder* depicts a firemen's parade; *In the Night* is brooding and claustrophobic – while others address philosophical themes. Among those in the latter category is *The Unanswered Question*. Like many of Ives' shorter works, its scoring is unconventional, requiring trumpet, four flutes and strings. In a preface to the score the composer gives a detailed (but here abridged) statement of his intentions.

> "The strings represent 'The Silences of the Druids – who Know, See and Hear Nothing.' The trumpet intones 'The Perennial Question of Existence.' But the hunt for 'The Invisible Answer' undertaken by the flutes becomes gradually more active, faster and louder. 'The Fighting Answerers' begin to mock 'The Question'... After they disappear, 'The Question' is asked for the last time, and the 'Silences' are heard beyond in 'Undisturbed Solitude.'"

Christopher Willcock was born in Sydney in 1947 and completed studies in composition under Peter Sculthorpe at the University of Sydney. He was ordained a Jesuit priest in 1977 and then pursued doctoral studies in sacramental and liturgical theology at the Institut Catholique in Paris. Presently a member of the United Faculty of Theology in Melbourne, he teaches courses in these areas with colleagues from the Jewish faith and from other Christian traditions.

Whilst most of his early compositional activity was in the area of liturgical music, Christopher Willcock has lately also been acquiring an increasing reputation as a composer of works for the concert hall. Highlights include his song cycle *Akhmatova Requiem*, winner of the 1998 Albert H. Maggs Composition Award; *Gospel Bestiary*, commissioned by Musica Viva for the Tallis Scholars' Australian tour in 2000; and *Southern Star*, winner of the AMC/APRA Choral Work of the Year Award in 2006. His *Divertimento: Nolan's Backyard* was composed for the Melbourne Chamber Orchestra and premiered in 2008.

> "'Nolan' in the title refers to the Australian painter Sidney Nolan, and his 'backyard' is nothing less than the Australian continent... Starting from Nolan's years growing up in St. Kilda with the mesmerizing presence there of the roller–coaster at Luna Park (*Luna Park in the moonlight*), through the distances and emptiness of the outback in the saga of Burke and Wills with the earth receiving back the body of one of the luckless explorers (*Perished*), to Nolan's return to the strong early childhood memories of the Goulburn River, now populated with characters from the Ned Kelly story (*Riverbend I*), the three movements of *Divertimento* map this composer's reactions to the visual associations generated for him by [these three] paintings but which are called, not by the titles of the paintings, but, respectively, Night Ride; Earth Song; and River Run."
>
> *Extract from the preface to the score*
> *quoted by kind permission of the composer.*

In the first movement the listener will hear the somewhat mechanical ascent and descent of the roller–coaster as well as more tranquil "moonlit" interpolations; in the second a mournful theme given initially given to a solo bass gradually increases in force until it expresses the overwhelming desolation, grandeur and terror of the outback. The finale features cadenzas for violin, viola and cello before ending in a mood of great serenity.

Tucana Flute Quartet

Tucana Flute Quartet was formed in 1992 with the aim of exploring the sonorities of the modern flutes: piccolo, flute, alto flute and bass flute. Tucana performs regularly around Sydney and has recorded for ABC FM and 2MBS FM. In 1996 Tucana premiered a work for flute quartet, sitar, bass and drums by Peter Schaefer at the Kiama Jazz Festival; the quartet presented two concerts of Australian music at the American National Flute Association's 25th annual convention in Chicago in 1997, and has performed at Australian Flute Conventions in Brisbane in 1999, Melbourne in 2002 and Sydney in 2006.

Christine Draeger: member of the SSO 1981–86 and The Seymour Group Ensemble 1982–2007. Freelance work 1986–present with AOBO, SSO, TSO, Synergy, The Song Company, Perihelion, Symeron. First prize Australian Flute Composition Competition 1999; has written many works for flute, including three quartets for Tucana. Founded Tucana Flute Quartet 1992.

Rosamund Plummer: member of the Elizabethan Melbourne Orchestra (SOV) 1978–1985, principal piccolo of the SSO 1986–present. First prize 4th National Flute Competition, Brisbane 1986. Founding member Tucana Flute Quartet 1992.

Lisa Breckenridge founded the Enigma Five wind quintet 1990; member of the Chambermaids wind quintet 2000–present. Casual work with SSO and AOBO 1991–present. Has played in many popular shows 1995–present, including *Phantom of the Opera*, *Miss Saigon*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Oliver*, *The Lion King*, *Wicked*. Joined Tucana Flute Quartet 1993.

Diane Berger studied in NSW and Indiana, USA. Principal piccolo AOBO 1989–present. Member of Quinterlude wind quintet since 1992 and Trio con Brio since 2000. Joined Tucana Flute Quartet 1997.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

The Bourbaki Ensemble is a chamber string orchestra based at St. Stephen's Church, Newtown. Concerts are also given regularly at Macquarie University. We perform the great masterpieces of the string repertoire alongside exciting little–known works, and take an especial interest in Australian music. Over the last nine years we have performed a total of thirty three Australian works by twenty six different composers.

As well as being a figure of importance in nineteenth century French military circles, General Charles Denis Sauter Bourbaki (1816–1897) had wide–ranging interests in both the arts and the sciences. Recent startling investigations into the career of his descendant Nicolas Bourbaki, professor of mathematics at the Royal Poldavian Academy, have suggested that much of his work should in fact be assigned to the older Bourbaki, who no doubt refrained from publishing his ideas due to a deep disdain for public acclaim. Much remains to be done before a definitive assessment of these claims can be given.

Violins Alastair Duff–Forbes, Kathryn Crossing, Clare Blakemore, Mark Chambers, Paul Hoskinson, Greta Lee, Emlyn Lewis–Jones, Deborah McGowan, Andrew McGrath, Paul Pokorny, Richard Willgoss.

Violas Kathryn Ramsay, Deirdre Boyle, Derek Davies, Kate Hughes.

Violoncellos Nicholas Thomas, Nicholas Comino, Ian Macourt.

Basses Sasha Marker, Mark Szeto.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

classic English, modern Australian: music for strings

Ralph Vaughan Williams Tallis Fantasia
Andrew Ford Oma Kodu
Wayne Dixon Mermaids
Charles Ives Hymn
Richard Willgoss General Bourbaki Rings the Changes
Chris Williams Altjiranga mitjina
Gustav Holst St. Paul's Suite

David Angell, conductor

2.30 pm, Sunday 25 July 2010
Macquarie Theatre, Macquarie University
Admission free

2.30 pm, Sunday 1 August 2010
St. Stephen's Church, Newtown
Tickets $22, concessions $15

Two of the great masterpieces from the English string repertoire; a continuation of our "composer–of–the–year" focus on Charles Ives; and no fewer than four recent Australian compositions. The new work by Richard Willgoss and the string orchestra version of Andrew Ford's clarinet quintet have been prepared especially for this programme. The Bourbaki Ensemble's recording of Wayne Dixon's *Mermaids* will be launched at these concerts.

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