# THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

reflections for strings

**Ralph Vaughan Williams** Tallis Fantasia

**Gustav Holst** St. Paul's Suite

**Andrew Ford** Oma Kodu

**Wayne Dixon** Mermaids

**Charles Ives** Hymn

**Richard Willgoss** General Bourbaki Rings the Changes

**Chris Williams** Altjiranga mitjina

Ken Burnett, clarinet

David Angell, conductor

**2.30 pm, Sunday 25 July 2010**

**Macquarie Theatre, Macquarie University**

**2.30 pm, Sunday 1 August 2010**

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

Welcome to the Bourbaki Ensemble's winter programme for 2010! These concerts feature no fewer than four recent works by Australian composers. Chris Williams' *Altjiranga mitjina* and Richard Willgoss's *General Bourbaki Rings the Changes* were both written in 2009, the latter intended especially for the present concerts. We also give the first live performances of Wayne Dixon's *Mermaids*, recorded last year by the Bourbaki Ensemble for a CD of Wayne's music which will be available for purchase today.

Also on the programme, the first performances of a string orchestra version of Andrew Ford's clarinet quintet *Oma Kodu*. David Angell was in the audience at the premiere performance of the quintet, given by the Australia Ensemble in 2007, and felt that the work might well be adapted for solo clarinet with a larger body of strings. On approaching Andrew to request permission to make such an adaptation, David was most gratified with the reply that this had already been in the composer's mind! In David's version of the work a double bass line has been added; in fuller textured passages the original four string parts have been expanded to as many as nine. However Andrew's melodic and harmonic material has been scrupulously preserved; in particular, the clarinet part is unchanged from the original. We are delighted to express our thanks to Andy not only for granting permission to rearrange his fine composition, but also for offering his encouragement and providing electronic files of the music in order to facilitate the project. Our gratitude is also due to Michael Flanagan for handling the modification of the files by means of Sibelius music notation software.

The concerts will also continue our composer–of–the–year focus on Charles Ives; and we realise one of our longstanding ambitions by performing Ralph Vaughan Williams' sublime *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*.

# PROGRAMME

**Gustav Holst** St. Paul's Suite

1. Jig
2. Ostinato
3. Intermezzo
4. Finale (The Dargason)

**Wayne Dixon** Mermaids

**Andrew Ford** *Oma Kodu*, for clarinet and string orchestra

Ken Burnett, clarinet

**INTERVAL**

20 minutes

**Richard Willgoss** General Bourbaki Rings the Changes

**Charles Ives** Hymn

**Chris Williams** Altjiranga mitjina

**Ralph Vaughan Williams** Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis

**Gustav Holst** (1874–1934) is best known, oddly, for a work not at all typical of his compositional output. While *The Planets* is scored for a very large orchestra, Holst was much more at home writing for chamber forces, small orchestra or unaccompanied voices. He possessed the none too common talent of writing attractive and satisfying music for non–professional musicians. The work with which today's concert opens was written in 1913 for the orchestra of St. Paul's Girls' School, Hammersmith, where Holst had been director of music since 1905.

*St. Paul's Suite* begins with a Jig, a sturdy dance using the characteristic rhythms and scales of English folk music; the movement is notable for a central section in which the harmony makes a clearly audible jump into a new area every few bars. The second movement is entitled *Ostinato*. The word is Italian for "obstinate", and in musical terminology denotes a theme which is repeated over and over, with the musical texture being elaborated in other parts. In this movement Holst actually employs two ostinati. The more prominent is heard at the outset in the second violins and maintained there throughout the entire piece, except for a few short bars in which it is taken over by the firsts while the composer rewards the seconds for their patience with a gracefully springing melody. The second ostinato occurs, as is more usual, in the lower instruments; consisting of a four–note descending scale, it is initially presented by the pizzicato cellos and bass at their first entry.

There follows an *Intermezzo*. The rather unEnglish character of the solo violin theme is explained by its origin in Holst's 1910 *Beni Mora* Suite, inspired by a visit to Algeria. In a faster section is heard a hint of Holst's fondness for five–beat rhythms. The finale returns to the English folk style and uses "The Dargason", a tune which actually sounds rather more like a jig than the first movement does. In passages of adroit counterpoint, the principal theme is combined with another melody in a different tempo. This second theme is too well known to need identification; suffice it to say that in a survey reported by the BBC in 1998, it topped the list of "the most loathsome electronic jingles" to hear when your phone call is put on hold.

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**Wayne Dixon** was born in Sydney in 1945 and has studied under many eminent musicians, including John Antill and Edward Cowie (composition) and Sir Adrian Boult and Vernon Handley (conducting). He has occupied a wide variety of posts in the academic and community sectors of the Australian musical scene, particularly in the Illawarra region.

The genesis of *Mermaids*, for string orchestra or eleven solo strings, is described by the composer in the following words.

> "At Narooma in the late afternoon sun, my wife and I observed a group of young girls, each colourfully dressed and with long, flowing hair, emerge from a rocky outcrop near the beach, gambol and cartwheel their way across the greens of the adjacent golf course and disappear towards the west. 'Local mermaids!' exclaimed my wife, and the images stayed with me powerfully, to produce this piece over the ensuing weeks."

The work consists of four broad sections: a calm opening in which the gradual accumulation of repetitive figures suggests the increasing activity of wind and waves on the sea; a serene violin solo supported by the heavy rolling of a slow ocean swell; a passionate interlude with the whole ensemble sharing in the thematic material; and a final return to the opening textures.

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Composer, writer and broadcaster **Andrew Ford** (born 1957) is well known in all three capacities to audiences both in Australia and overseas. As a composer he has won major awards, notably the Paul Lowin Prize for his song cycle *Learning to Howl*. His writings on music include *Illegal Harmonies*, a survey of twentieth century music, and the collection of interviews *Composer to Composer*. Since 1995 he has presented *The Music Show* each Saturday morning on ABC Radio National.

The clarinet quintet *Oma kodu* was composed in April 2006 and is based on music of the Setu people, an ethnic minority from south-eastern Estonia. “Oma kodu kiitmise laul” is a choral song in praise of one’s own home. Its words resemble those of “Home Sweet Home”, but without the sentimentality.

The beginning of the work is marked “earthy, intense”, and could fancifully be described as “dancing in mud” (the composer has mentioned being attracted by the “rather dogged nature of the melodic line” in the original Setu song). The clarinet’s monotone opening gradually begins to disclose the theme one or two notes at a time. It is first heard in full about ninety seconds into the piece, when the strings drop out and leave the clarinet unaccompanied. Subsequent episodes involve much use of open strings, evoking a “folk fiddle” atmosphere, and an extended section in which cellos and basses remain silent while interwoven melodic strands are heard in the clarinet and violins. After a brief pause, a slowed–down, “frozen” version of the opening forms the work’s concluding section.

*Programme note based, with permission, on material from* `www.andrewford.net.au`.

General Bourbaki is known to have had many interesting facets to his life and times, one of which was an indefatigable support for the musical arts. He visited Rheims Cathedral on one rare occasion, ringing the changes to his strict military regime, only to find himself moved to tears by the beauty of the singing from the choir as it reverberated in the cathedral space. This celebratory work in honour of the orchestra's namesake is based on ringing the changes of harmony and acoustic effect associated loosely to a Bach–like chorale. The music begins with the ensemble centralised on the stage but players soon disperse to surround the listeners with voices from every direction. An eventual return to the stage brings all players to end on the strange beauty and simplicity of a Renaissance bare fifth.

Whilst having spent all his working life, like Borodin, as a scientist/engineer, **Richard Willgoss** also wanted a musical facet to his career. In later life, he has requalified with music and philosophy degrees and now composes. He is latterly researching compositional creativity at Sydney Conservatorium of Music and making violins.

*Programme note kindly supplied by the composer.*

Every Bourbaki Ensemble programme this year includes a short piece by **Charles Ives** (1874–1954). During his lifetime, few of his fellow Americans found Ives' modernism to their taste, and it was the Austrian composer Arnold Schoenberg, originator of a very different kind of modern music, who wrote in the 1940s: "There is a great Man living in this country – a composer. He has solved the problem how to preserve one's self and to learn. He responds to negligence by contempt. He is not forced to accept praise or blame. His name is Ives."

Ives' art springs from the soil of American nineteenth century culture and society: musical ideas inspired by the New England transcendentalist philosophers sit alongside popular song, brass bands, marches and hymns. Ives frequently juxtaposes these sounds without making any apparent attempt to smooth over the inevitable clashes between them, so that they appear to fortuitously coincide just as they might in the town square outside the concert hall. It is as if he says to the audience, “These are the sounds of the world about you. Just listen!”

Composed in 1904, Ives’ brief *Hymn* is a meditation on the revivalist hymn tune “More Love to Thee”: the four notes which begin the hymn are heard at the very start in the basses, and repeatedly throughout the work. The dissonances of the harmony are never harsh but always poignant and expressive, testifying to Ives’ deep emotional connection with his sources. As if to tease the listener, there are occasional fleeting hints of more conventional chords. But the first and only clear major triad is that with which the three–minute span of the piece ends.

**Chris Williams** completed his degree in composition, with first class honours, at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music last year. Significant teachers have included Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, Elliott Gyger and his current and long term mentor Nigel Butterley. Chris’s music has been performed by Australian ensembles including the Song Company and the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, as well as in the USA and Italy.

*Altjiranga mitjina* (2009) is an Aranda expression which means approximately “the timeless dimension of dreams”. After a slow introduction, the main part of Chris Williams’ composition is based upon the “looping” of a single set of pitches, which Chris sees as “an approximation of expressive timelessness, [resulting in] a kind of meditation”. In classical terms one might call *Altjiranga mitjina* a sort of passacaglia, although, in contrast to traditional procedure, the composer varies the tempo and pitch of the theme, as well as allowing it to overlap with itself. Faster, more rhythmic sections and a brief violin cadenza are among the means by which the composer expands the work's emotional range, without ever losing sight of his overall aims in this beautifully crafted and expressive composition.

In the early years of the twentieth century, yet to make his mark as a composer, **Ralph Vaughan Williams** (1872–1958) was engaged in editing the *English Hymnal*. Besides writing some of the music himself, he keenly sought to include some of the great English musical heritage of earlier centuries. It was in this connection that he came across the tunes written by Thomas Tallis in 1567 for Matthew Parker's verse renderings of the Psalms. The third tune is composed in the Phrygian mode, of all early tonal systems the most distant from the major and minor keys; this feature must have strongly attracted Vaughan Williams, who was striving to depart from the well–worn paths of musical romanticism and to move in new directions.

The *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* was premiered at the Three Choirs Festival in 1910. It is scored for two string orchestras, the second in fact consisting of only nine players and placed at a distance from the first; in some passages four members of the first orchestra play as a string quartet, with first violin and viola having extensive solos. The variation of texture does much to establish the unique sonority of the *Fantasia*.

In the initial part of the work the whole ensemble largely plays as one, introducing and developing Tallis's theme. Subsequent sections exploit the contrast between solos, small orchestra and full orchestra; after a majestic climax the theme is given at length once more, by solo violin with a wonderfully rhapsodic solo viola counterpoint. A radiant G major chord concludes a composition which is, beyond dispute, one of the supreme creations of Western musical literature.

**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 under internationally famous conductors including Sir Charles Mackerras, Stuart Challender, Richard Bonynge and John Hopkins. He is active in chamber music, having been the violist of the Kurraba String Quartet and the Wombat String Quartet, and has extensive experience playing in pit bands for community musical theatre productions.

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 then the Ensemble has attracted note for its imaginative programming and its support of Australian composers. David has conducted the Bourbaki Ensemble in two recordings released on CD by Wirripang, and in numerous concerts recorded for broadcast on 2MBS–FM. Since its inception in December 2002 he has also been the conductor of Orchestra 143, a classical chamber orchestra based in Turramurra, and he has guest conducted the Mosman Orchestra and the North Sydney Symphony Orchestra.

In 2002 David co–wrote and conducted the soundtrack for the film *Compost Monster*, which has been screened in Sydney and in London. For the present concert he prepared, with the composer's permission, a string orchestra version of Andrew Ford's clarinet quintet *Oma Kodu*. 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.

## 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. The Ensemble presents programmes which feature the great masterpieces of the string repertoire alongside exciting lesser–known works, and takes a particular interest in Australian music. As well as performing music by established Australian composers, the Bourbaki Ensemble is keen to encourage talented younger composers, and has given the world premieres of nine new Australian works – with more to come before the end of the year!

The Bourbaki Ensemble appears on the CDs *Into His Countenance*, *Mozart in Love* and *Mermaids*, available from Publications by Wirripang, and is a major world centre for research into the life of General Charles Denis Sauter Bourbaki (1816–1897).

**Violins** Alastair Duff–Forbes, Kathryn Crossing, Elaine Armstrong, Daniel Bangert, Clare Blakemore, Elizabeth Cooney, Lesley Larkum, Greta Lee, Emlyn Lewis–Jones, Deborah McGowan, Andrew McGrath, Paul Pokorny, Shaun Stewart, Justin White, Richard Willgoss.

**Violas** Kathryn Ramsay, Deirdre Boyle, Rosy Davidson, Derek Davies, Kate Hughes.

**Violoncellos** Nicholas Thomas, Nicholas Comino, Clare Kahn, Ian Macourt, Steve Meyer, Bronwen Whyatt.

**Basses** Caitlin Cahill, Mark Szeto, Joal Taylor.

**Clarinet** Ken Burnett.

# THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

ten years of music for strings

**Thomas Wilson** St. Kentigern Suite
**Charles Ives** The Rainbow
**Terry Riley** In C
**Phillip Wilcher** Adagio
**Lachlan Skipworth** new work

David Angell, conductor

**2.30 pm, Sunday 5 December 2010**
**St. Stephen's Church, Newtown**
Tickets $22, concessions $15

A celebratory programme marking the completion of ten years of Bourbaki Ensemble concerts in Newtown and elsewhere!

The programme includes two personal favourites: Scottish composer Thomas Wilson's dazzling and profound *St. Kentigern Suite*, first performed by the Bourbaki Ensemble in 2005, and from our CD *Mozart in Love*, Charles Ives' wordless setting of Wordsworth's *The Rainbow*, in which the vocal line is given to a solo cor anglais.

There will be two world premiere performances: the *Adagio* of Phillip Wilcher, whose works we have been privileged to perform and record a number of times over the years; and a new work by outstanding young Sydney composer Lachlan Skipworth.

To wind up our tenth year, Terry Riley's seminal 1960s minimalist composition *In C*, in effect a semi-controlled improvisation for the whole ensemble.

Further information 0433074322 or `www.bourbakiensemble.org`

Programme details subject to change