THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

ten years of music for strings

Thomas Wilson St. Kentigern Suite

Charles Ives The Rainbow

Phillip Wilcher Adagio

Terry Riley In C

Rachel Tolmie, cor anglais

Christine Draeger, flute

Prue Gibbs, piano

David Angell, conductor

2.30 pm, Sunday 12 December 2010

St. Stephen's Church, Newtown

Welcome to the third and final concert in the Bourbaki Ensemble's tenth season!! For this auspicious occasion we have assembled a programme in which every single work has special significance for us. In planning our 2004 concerts, Scottish composer Thomas Wilson's *St. Kentigern Suite* was a piece which we came across while browsing the internet. The sparkling reviews, commenting not only on the work's beauty but its profundity, immediately caught our attention. Of course consideration of potential repertoire doesn't end there: a marvellous piece of music might simply be too difficult for us to perform. Nor can you believe everything you read on the net: sometimes a piece attracts a great deal of undeserved hype. So programming a work under these circumstances always involves an element of risk. Nevertheless, we did take the risk, and found ourselves fully justified. I have no hesitation in describing the *St. Kentigern Suite* as one of the great string works of the late twentieth century, and am delighted to be performing it once more.

Charles Ives' *The Rainbow* was brought to our attention by Rachel Tolmie when she proposed it for inclusion on our CD *Mozart in Love*. The amazing contrasts in Ives' music, even when the whole piece lasts only a couple of minutes, are striking. This is one of my favourite items from the CD and I look forward to finally performing it in concert.

We have had the privilege of performing and recording a number of works by Sydney composer Phillip Wilcher. At today's concert we give the premiere performance of Phillip's newly composed *Adagio* for flute, cor anglais, piano and strings. Though I've not asked the composer, I suspect it's no coincidence that this work uses the same instrumentation as the Ives, and that he may have been inspired by the recording on our CD, which also contains three of Phillip's works. Phillip's music is consistently gentle and lyrical: we trust that you will enjoy it.

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PROGRAMME

Thomas Wilson St. Kentigern Suite

I. Bird
II. Fish
III. Ring
IV. Bell
V. Tree

Charles Ives The Rainbow

Rachel Tolmie, cor anglais

Phillip Wilcher *Adagio* for flute, cor anglais, piano and string orchestra

Christine Draeger, flute
Rachel Tolmie, cor anglais
Prue Gibbs, piano

INTERVAL
20 minutes

Terry Riley In C

Thomas Wilson (1927–2001) was born in the USA of British parents, but spent nearly all his life in Scotland, and for most of his composing career was associated with the City of Glasgow. He received commissions from the BBC, the Edinburgh Festival, the Henry Wood Proms and many others, and in 1990 was awarded the CBE. His works include four symphonies, two operas and a wide variety of orchestral, choral, chamber and vocal compositions. Wilson's *St. Kentigern Suite* has been widely performed and critically acclaimed in such terms as "dazzling" and "wonderfully subtle and elegant".

St. Kentigern, also known as St. Mungo, is the patron saint of Glasgow. Wilson's suite was premiered in 1986 as part of the 850th anniversary celebrations of Glasgow Cathedral; its background is described by the composer in a preface to the score.

> St. Kentigern is a shadowy yet vivid figure. He comes down to us by way of a few rather random facts and many legends and stories. But the scanty evidence matters little. His real achievement is that he gripped the imagination, and continues to do so in the familiar symbols of The Bird, The Fish, The Ring, The Bell and The Tree which feature on Glasgow's Coat of Arms to this day.
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> My music takes these five symbols as its starting point. . . the first movement of my suite uses *The Bird* not only as a reminder of a miraculous event, but also as a symbol of Kentigern's aspiration to higher things – the conversion of the world, and the achievement of sanctity.
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> In the second movement *The Fish* is the activist, the messenger (as in the legend of the restoration of the missing ring). But the fish also has another dimension in that it was one of the most universally known Christian symbols of early times.
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> *The Ring* centres on the inner world of Kentigern the contemplative, the thinker. The circle is the perfect shape; it has no beginning and no end and as such, presents a potent meditative symbol of perfection and eternity.

> The fourth movement, *The Bell*, is a straightforward evocation of Kentigern proclaiming his message. It is a solemn yet urgently joyous, even raucous carillon. As the clamour recedes, the gentle fifth movement, *The Tree*, follows on without a break... An ancient plainsong melody – *Ubi caritas et amor Deus ibi est* – sets the tone for this serene meditation on the work of a man whose influence has been immeasurable.
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It may be worth while to add a few comments on the means by which the composer realises his aims. Wilson's harmony is frequently complex and dissonant; but with the exception of the deliberately "raucous" peals of bells in the fourth movement, the dissonance is for the most part presented quietly, so that the effect is mysterious rather than harsh. Unusually for a contemporary composition, the *St. Kentigern Suite* is planned around three lengthy melodies: original themes in the first and third movements, and the plainsong of the last. These create points of repose and help listeners to keep their bearings in a work of considerable activity.

The first movement begins with an evocation of the bird's dipping, diving flight; the initial soaring figure in the violas will later be transformed to provide the openings of the second and third movements, and will reappear in its original form "like an echo" at the end of the entire work. The first movement continues with a quiet foretaste of the tolling bell which will underlie the fourth movement; this is succeeded by a wayward and expressive violin melody. *The Fish* is full of triplets and *glissandi*, creating a "slippery" effect as of the fish gliding through its watery habitat, and ends (perhaps) with a chain of bubbles. The third movement is centred upon a concentrated, intense and ecstatic melody for solo violin. The clamour of the fourth movement and serenity of the last complete a magnificent demonstration of how a distinctly modern musical technique can be employed in the composition of profoundly expressive music.

The third work by **Charles Ives** (1874–1954) to be performed in this year's Bourbaki concerts is *The Rainbow*, a wordless setting of William Wordsworth's verse of the same title. Ives scrupulously gives every syllable of the poem to a solo cor anglais, supported by a chamber orchestra of flute, piano and strings. Like much of Ives' music, *The Rainbow* is, despite its brevity, a work of startling contrasts. A strong beginning and two dissonant outbursts lead to a tranquil continuation and a scarcely audible concluding chord.

The Rainbow

My heart leaps up when I behold
  A rainbow in the sky:
So was it when my life began,
  So is it now I am a man,
So be it when I shall grow old
  Or let me die!
The child is father of the man:
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.

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.

Today we present Phillip's recently composed *Adagio* for flute, cor anglais, piano and strings. The *Adagio* is, in effect, a purely melodic work. Each instrument has a series of quiet and beautifully shaped themes to play, and the harmony arises solely from the combination of these diverse but stylistically related melodies. The result is a gentle poignancy which suffuses the whole piece. We are honoured that this fine work is inscribed “for David Angell and the Bourbaki Ensemble”.

Terry Riley (1935–) was born and educated in California, and is closely associated both as a composer and pianist with the West Coast avant–garde. He has composed for a wide variety of performers and ensembles, most notably the Kronos Quartet for whom his compositions include *Cadenza on the Night Plain* and *Salome Dances For Peace*.

In C, Terry Riley’s first piece to receive wide public recognition, makes a clear break with traditional ways of writing and notating music. The composer does not specify what instruments are to be used; while it is usual to employ a wide variety of contrasting timbres, any combination of instruments (and voices) is permitted. Performances have included one by an ensemble of traditional Chinese instruments, one by five keyboards and vibraphone, and even one by an orchestra of laptops! We believe that the subtle variations available within the relatively homogeneous sound of a string orchestra will also work well.

The “mechanics” of *In C* are easily described. The whole piece is written on just one A3 page, every musician playing from the same part, and consists of fifty three numbered segments. A keyboard sets the tempo with a continuous quaver pulse on C, and maintains it without variation throughout the course of the piece. Each performer enters whenever he or she wishes and plays the first segment as many times as desired before moving on to the next. After everyone has completed the last segment, the work concludes with the quaver pulse alone. A performance of *In C* will thus be of indeterminate duration: the composer suggests that each segment could be played for a week, with the fifty third bringing in the New Year. This is (probably) a joke; in actual fact there exist recordings of *In C* as short as 16 minutes and as long as 77. Two recorded performances led by Terry Riley in person come in at 42 and 76 minutes.

If it is easy enough to give a "merely correct" rendition of *In C*, it is far harder to give a musically effective performance. The key aim is to strike a balance between the individual and the ensemble. In two closely written pages of instructions (or perhaps only suggestions: Riley seems disinclined to be overly dogmatic) the composer gives the performers some hints as to how this is to be achieved. First of all, every player must continually and intently listen to his or her colleagues and play in such a way as to agree – or, if more appropriate, to contrast – with what is already happening. The necessity of making individual decisions is, of course, most unusual in an "orchestral" setting. In rehearsal the freedom can initially be rather intimidating, but once one is accustomed to it, it becomes exhilarating!

So, what can you expect to hear? If all goes well, patterns will gradually appear and disappear as different performers proceed at different rates through the score. If you listen carefully there should be numerous moments at which you hear something new happening. The work starts with the notes C, E and F; after a while you will hear someone – probably, at first, just one person – playing a G; a little later it may well be that all the pitches except C disappear again. At times there will be two or more performers playing the same segment in different alignments as a sort of "micro–canon". There is much more but from here on you will have to find it for yourself! With up to twenty individual parts sounding simultaneously there will always be a lot happening, and very likely no two listeners will hear "the same" piece. But whatever you hear, we trust that it will be an exciting and satisfying experience.

David Angell, conductor

Today marks David's debut as a violist with the Bourbaki Ensemble! He has played 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.

David took up conducting in 1998 with a highly acclaimed 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 is also the conductor of Orchestra 143, a chamber orchestra based in Turramurra.

Rachel Tolmie, cor anglais

Rachel started playing the recorder and piano when she was four, and took up the oboe at age ten. She completed a Bachelor of Music degree at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music and after graduation also earned a Fellowship in Music from the Australian Music Examinations Board. 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 Bourbaki Ensemble, the Conservatorium High School Orchestra, the Balmain Sinfonia, the East–West Philharmonic Orchestra and the Central Coast Symphony Orchestra. She frequently appears in recital with associate artist John Martin.

Christine Draeger, flute

Christine studied flute with Zdenek Bruderhans at Adelaide University, graduating in 1979 with a Bachelor of Music (Honours). She was a member of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra 1981–86, and has worked with the Adelaide SO, the Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra and the Tasmanian SO.

Christine was a member of Australia's leading contemporary music ensemble, The Seymour Group, from 1982 until 2007. She has recorded two CDs of Australian flute music, *Streeton's Noon* and *Eat Chocolate and Cry*.

Christine has composed music for solo flute, flute quartet and theatre pieces. She has written the music for, and performed in, three shows with actor/storyteller Jane Ahquist: *The Secret Mermaid* (1997), *The Bird Parliament* (2000) and *Two Fires Suite* (2005). Christine's music is pulished by Reed Music and the Australian Music Centre.

Prue Gibbs, piano

After studying at the Queensland Conservatorium under Max Olding, Prue spent ten years as repetiteur for Queensland Opera and Ballet Companies and musical director for Queensland Theatre Company. She subsequently received a Diploma of Chamber Music at the École Normale de Musique in Paris.

In 2005 Prue retired after fifteen years as Head of Piano at Ascham School. Her time now is spent accompanying, vocal coaching, piano teaching and conducting with local eisteddfodau, community musical organisations and many other groups.

For the season of Advent 2010 the world premiere of *The Masque of the Magi*, a poem by James Elroy Flecker set to music by Lindsay Aked, is being performed in churches on the Northern Beaches. Prue is musical director for this haunting presentation of the Christmas story.

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To finish off our tenth year, one of the classics of the twentieth century repertoire. Terry Riley's *In C*, written in 1964, is one of the earliest and greatest products of the minimalist school of composition. It may be performed by any combination of instruments and/or voices, but it is customary to use a mixed ensemble of strings, wind, brass, keyboards and percussion. It is very unusual for it to be played by strings alone (with the assistance of a single keyboard – thank you Prue!), but we hope to show that the string orchestra is amply capable of providing a fascinating variety of textures. One of the features of *In C* is that the performers are given a good deal of latitude in deciding exactly what to play. We have had a great deal of fun rehearsing this piece, and hope that you will enjoy the result!

There are significant numbers of people who have heard nearly every Bourbaki Ensemble concert for the last ten years. Whether you are one of our long–term listeners or are experiencing your first Bourbaki concert, we hope you will be with us for the next ten years! We warmly thank you for your support.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

Violins Alastair Duff–Forbes, Elizabeth Cooney, Clare Blakemore, Camille Hanrahan–Tan, Madeleina Hanrahan–Tan, Greta Lee, Emlyn Lewis–Jones, Andrew McGrath, Justin White, Richard Willgoss.

Violas Rosy Davidson, Janice Buttle, Mark Chambers, Derek Davies.

Violoncellos Nicholas Thomas, Nicholas Comino, Clare Kahn, Steve Meyer.

Basses Caitlin Cahill, Mark Szeto.

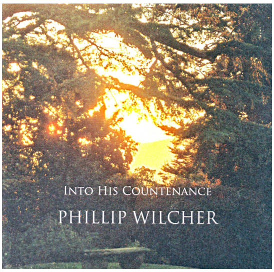
Flute Christine Draeger.

Piano/keyboard Prue Gibbs.

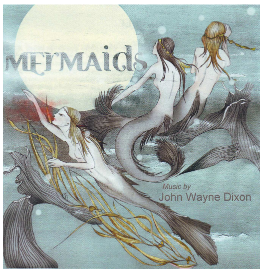
BOURBAKI RECORDINGS

The Bourbaki Ensemble features on three CDs released by Wirripang. These are available for purchase at interval today, and online from the publishers at `http://australiancomposers.com.au`.

Mozart in Love is (for the most part) a collection of music for oboe or cor anglais with string orchestra. Soloist Rachel Tolmie performs Ives' *The Rainbow*, heard in today's concert, as well as music by Alan Ridout, Aaron Copland (with Andrew del Riccio, trumpet) and Colin Brumby. There are also two pieces for oboe and strings by Phillip Wilcher, and a third, *Into His Countenance*, in which the Bourbaki Ensemble accompanies flute soloist Amanda Muir.



The three Wilcher pieces also appear on the CD *Into His Countenance*, issued to celebrate Phillip's fiftieth birthday in 2008. Other repertoire on this disc includes music for oboe and piano, and piano solos performed by John Martin and Jeanell Carrigan.



Mermaids showcases music of Wollongong composer John Wayne Dixon. Bourbaki's contribution to the disc consists of the title track, a work for eleven solo strings recorded in 2009. A version for larger ensemble was performed in our July/August 2010 concerts.