THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

music for strings and percussion

Mozart Serenata Notturna
Elgar Serenade for Strings
Sculthorpe Irkanda IV
Sibelius Rakastava
Suk Serenade for Strings

Margaret Howard, violin
David Angell, conductor

2.30 pm, Sunday 3 March 2002

St. Stephen's Church, Newtown

Welcome to the first Bourbaki Ensemble performance for 2002! Planning further ahead this year than last, we have decided on three varied programmes. The first is based on the addition of percussion to the string orchestra. In works ranging from the classical period to the 1960s, we show how composers have exploited this unusual and fascinating combination.

Full details of our other concerts this year – also to be held here at St. Stephen's – are to be found on the back cover of this programme. The second concert, on July 28, is structured around the theme of "dance and verse". Britten's *Serenade for tenor, horn and strings* is a setting of verse by various poets; Australian composer Nigel Butterley's *Goldengrove*, though not a vocal work, was inspired by Gerard Manley Hopkins' *Spring and Fall*, a meditation on the transience of life and of beauty. These two pieces will be bracketed by "dance" episodes – Eastern European from Bartók, and French from Peter Warlock.

Our third concert, on November 17, will combine favourite Baroque pieces with twentieth century works having a Baroque connection. Among Respighi's best known works are the two suites of *Ancient Airs and Dances* for full orchestra; less well known is the third suite, for strings alone. We also perform the ninth of Villa–Lobos' *Bachianas Brasileiras*, in which the formal clarity of Bach is combined with Brazilian vitality.

We hope that you enjoy the present concert and will be able to join us for the remainder of our 2002 season!

The Bourbaki Ensemble would like to express its gratitude to Newtown High School of the Performing Arts for the loan of the timpani used in this performance. In particular, our thanks to Robin Amm, principal, for giving permission, and Emlyn Lewis–Jones of the Music Department for organising the details. As always, our thanks to all at St. Stephen's for the use of their beautiful and sonorous church.

PROGRAMME

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart Serenata Notturna, K 239

I Marcia: maestoso
II Menuetto
III Rondo: Allegretto

Sir Edward Elgar Serenade for Strings in E minor, Op. 20

I Allegro piacevole
II Larghetto
III Allegretto

Peter Sculthorpe Irkanda IV

Solo violin: Margaret Howard

INTERVAL — 20 minutes

Jean Sibelius Rakastava, Op. 14

I Rakastava (*The Lover*)
II Rakastetun tie (*The Path of the beloved*)
III Hyvåå iltaa... Jåå hyvåsti (*Good evening... farewell*)

Josef Suk Serenade for Strings in E flat major, Op. 6

I Andante con moto
II Allegro ma non troppo e grazioso
III Adagio
IV Allegro giocoso, ma non troppo presto

The term *serenata*, in music of the classical period, generally denotes a work of lighter character than a sonata or symphony, the word being more or less interchangeable with the term *divertimento*. No composer wrote such works more memorably than **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** (1756–1791). His serenades and divertimentos are extraordinarily diverse in their instrumentation, ranging from the great Divertimento for string trio, written in 1788, to the Serenade K 286 which requires four orchestras of strings and horns. The *Serenata Notturna* is scored for a quartet of soloists, string orchestra and timpani. The instrumentation displays an interest on Mozart's part in unusual tone colours: not only is there a pair of timpani to give an edge to the string tone, but the solo quartet is made up of two violins, viola and bass rather than the standard string quartet.

Often a serenata was written for outdoor performance, and would therefore begin with a march, to be played as the musicians assembled. In the case of the *Serenata Notturna*, perhaps, Mozart was having a joke at the expense of the musicians: while the work begins with a familiar martial rhythm, it takes only a few bars before the main stress is displaced from the first beat of the bar to the third, and, later, the second. Any attempt to march to this music would require serious concentration!

The second movement of the *Serenata* is a minuet, a triple–time dance strongly favoured as a part of instrumental works in the classical period. The minuet, as usual, is heard twice, interrupted by a contrasting section which here is given to the four solo instruments without the orchestra. The finale begins with a few bars from the solo quartet, soon joined by the orchestra, and passes to a substantial section for soloists alone. Brilliant figuration from the second (solo) violin provides a constant background throughout much of the movement. Abruptly and surprisingly, the music slows down to a brief *Adagio*, finishing with a short violin cadenza which leads into a new and slightly faster episode. Alternations of the material already presented lead to the triumphant conclusion of this joyous work.

Among the great composers there were perhaps few with such a complex personality as **Sir Edward Elgar** (1857–1934). While in his public role as Master of the King's Musick, baronet and holder of the Order of Merit he could be stand–offish and brusque, in his private life Elgar was insecure and tormented by self–doubt. On the one hand his major works were celebrated as an evocation of imperial Britain (in some cases, a very limited view of deeply profound music); on the other, he was capable of refusing a dinner–party invitation in the words, "you will not wish your table to be disgraced by the son of a piano–tuner".

Every aspect of Elgar's character finds a place in his music: resolution, sometimes approaching bombast; love of the English countryside ("like something you hear down by the river", he said of a passage in the First Symphony); dreamlike nostalgia; deepest despair. Some of this can be heard even in his early works. The *Serenade for Strings* from 1892, though written in the composer's thirty–fifth year, must count as one of these, for undeniable success did not come his way until the first performance of the *Enigma Variations* in 1899. The greatest of the three movements is surely the second, which anticipates the great slow movements of Elgar's later works. A violin theme rises from the very lowest note of the instrument, overshoots its target and sinks back down again; the same shape is heard throughout the movement, varied by constant alterations of its intervals. A sustained note in the first violins tenuously links the first section to the second, where a breathtakingly quiet and intense melody is supported by deep chords and occasional counterpoints. These two themes provide the main material for what is perhaps Elgar's first great slow movement.

Elgar doubtless judged that a short work with a central movement of such intensity demanded outer movements of a lighter character. The first starts with an abrupt rhythmic motive in the violas, introducing a minor–key theme whose alternating ascents and descents give it not so much a tragic as a sorrowful air. The rhythmic motive continues intermittently and is still to be heard punctuating the ensuing major section, whose main theme floats delicately over a syncopated accompaniment.

The third movement begins with a wistful theme full of gentle offbeat accents, with a gently undulating melody introduced by the violas in the fourth bar. These motives are all that Elgar needs to provide an apposite contrast to the intensity of the second movement, and to introduce a truncated reprise of the first, in which the initial viola rhythm brings the work to a close on richly scored chords of E major.

The recognition of **Peter Sculthorpe** (born 1929) as one of Australia's leading composers may be regarded as dating from the premiere in 1961 of *Irkanda IV*, which, according to the composer in his autobiography *Sun Music*, was his "first work... to receive wide and unanimous acclaim". In 1960 Sculthorpe had returned to Australia from study in Oxford because of his father's serious illness; *Irkanda IV* was completed the following year, the score headed "written upon the death of my father", and first performed by Wilfred Lehmann and the Astra Chamber Orchestra, conducted by George Logie–Smith.

The word *Irkanda* is of Aboriginal origin, and the composer takes it to mean "a remote and lonely place". His earlier compositions include *Irkanda I* for unaccompanied violin, a work which shares something of the mood of *Irkanda IV*, and two other pieces, later withdrawn, under the same title.

A feature of the score of *Irkanda IV* is the use made by the composer of detailed Italian directions going far beyond standard musical vocabulary. The opening of the piece, for example, is to be performed *con desiderio pieno di malincolia*, "with the fullest desire for melancholy". It unfolds a brooding violin melody above a static harmony: a device which Sculthorpe has used often and with great effect, evoking, in the opinion of some commentators, the flatness of much of the Australian horizon. After contrasting episodes the opening returns *fortissimo*, and is succeeded by a passage of somewhat martial character. After another *fortissimo* reprise of the opening the work reaches its climax in a passage marked *profondamente angosciato*, "profoundly anguished", which leads into a coda *preso da rassegnazione*, "seized by resignation".

The coda begins with slow, repeated notes on bass and cello, joined by anguished sighs in violas and cellos and leading into a brief cadenza, *con desiderio di solitudine*, for the solo violin. The cadenza is succeeded by a passage recomposed from a song written a year or two earlier, with which Sculthorpe had not been satisfied. The song sets words from D.H. Lawrence's *Sun in Me*; although *Irkanda* contains no vocal line, the text clearly underlies the composer's conception of the coda as "an affirmation of life and living".

A sun will rise in me, . . .
And a sun in heaven.
And beyond that, the immense sun behind the sun,
the sun of immense distances, . . .
And further, the sun within the atom
which is god in the atom.

Jean Sibelius (1865–1957) originally wrote the *Rakastava* suite for unaccompanied chorus. That its origin is in no way discernible in the final version (Grove's dictionary wisely and significantly refers to it as "recomposed" rather than "arranged" for strings, timpani and triangle) is testament to Sibelius' extraordinary instrumental imagination and his intimate understanding of the string orchestra.

The suite begins with a magical texture of syncopation, flexible tempo and mysterious harmonies. Typical of Sibelius' later music, these harmonies often consist of combinations of chords, individually consonant, but dissonant when superimposed. With the entry of the timpani the strings descend into a hushed murmuring, and the movement ends with a brief reminder of its opening.

The middle of the three movements consists of a simple melody animated with repeated notes to give a shimmering effect. Only six bars long, the theme is played over and over, gradually transforming itself into different but recognisably similar shapes. This intensely quiet movement is described by Raymond Tuttle as "a hushed and ecstatic *moto perpetuo*" which "whispers along with a joy so intense that it cannot raise its voice for fear of vanishing". Six strokes on the triangle herald a slight increase in volume and a new theme; but the theme has hardly begun when the movement does indeed vanish, a last ascending scale disappearing into silence.

The third movement, *Good evening... farewell*, begins with a rocking figure which turns out to be the accompaniment to a calm violin solo. A single cello adds a dissonant note, lending the music an unquiet texture and hinting at the turmoil to come. Suddenly everything falls apart. Three scurrying, trembling passages are interrupted by silences; accents and crescendi lead the music into the grief–stricken *Lento* which concludes the work in an atmosphere of frozen despair.

Josef Suk (1874–1935) is not a composer whose works have achieved the highest level of popularity; nevertheless he is an important member of the Czech school of composition which reached its peak with his father–in–law Antonín Dvořák. In later life Suk's music became increasingly intense and chromatic, though his reputation as a gloomy and pessimistic composer probably rests, unfairly, on one work, the *Asrael* symphony, written soon after the death of his wife and father–in–law.

Suk's *Serenade for Strings* was written in 1892, the same year as Elgar's. Suk was not yet twenty years old, and had recently begun studying with Dvořák. The *Serenade* is a relaxed and genial work, and was very likely inspired by Dvořák's own string serenade. The first movement has a fresh, breezy feel to it and contrasts two themes, the first mostly descending in contour and the second ascending. The second movement is a waltz, notable for offbeat accents and sudden changes of dynamics. Its central section combines arpeggios in chords with a brief rhythmic figure shared between first and second violins; a slower tempo brings in a recollection on solo violin and viola of the first movement theme.

The *Adagio* begins with a glorious romantic theme scored for cellos in three parts, each phrase echoed by violins. A descending pizzicato passage in the bass leads to an elaborately scored episode with a new theme for violins and then violas. The music becomes faster and more tense; eventually the violins and violas exit with a flourish, leaving the celli to relax the tempo and prepare the return of the first theme. The movement comes to a close with two solo violins weaving gentle figurations over a sonorous chordal accompaniment. The finale presents a variety of themes over a constant chattering of quavers, their motion interrupted occasionally by a more solemn mood. A final return to the familiar quaver motion and a sparkling *vivace* bring the *Serenade* to an exciting conclusion.

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. He is currently a member of the Ku–Ring–Gai Philharmonic Orchestra, and is also active in chamber music. As a violist and chorister David has performed for such well–known conductors as 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. The following year, as guest conductor with the North Sydney Symphony Orchestra, he gave a rare amateur performance of Brahms' first orchestral *Serenade*. In 2001 David assembled the Bourbaki Ensemble and conducted its inaugural season, performing works by Sculthorpe, Mahler, Shostakovich and others. He is looking forward to the Ensemble's second year and hopes that there will be many more! David is currently studying conducting with Richard Gill.

Margaret Howard, violin

Margaret graduated from the University of Sydney with a Bachelor of Music (Honours Class I) in 2001. She majored in violin performance, studying with Philippa Paige. A highlight of her degree was performing Karol Szymanowski's Violin Concerto No. 2 with the University of Sydney Symphony Orchestra in 1999. Margaret currently teaches violin, plays in a string quartet for private functions and plays in various community–based musical groups. She has recently returned from the first 2002 season of the Australian Youth Orchestra in Melbourne. In the future, Margaret hopes to continue her violin studies and to develop her skills as a violin teacher.

The Bourbaki Ensemble is a combination of professional string players and amateurs from some of Sydney's leading community orchestras. The principal aim of the ensemble is to perform music from the string orchestra repertoire, which, though it contains many well–loved compositions, is often neglected in favour of works for full orchestra. We also intend to include music by Australian composers in each of our programmes.

Charles Denis Sauter Bourbaki (1816–1897) was a general in the French army, and played an important role in the Crimean War. In 1862 he was offered, but declined, the throne of Greece. Few of the details of his life recorded in our programmes are historically accurate; however, we continue to believe that his name is well suited to a group of people united semi–anonymously in a common purpose.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

Violins Warwick Pulley, Sheau–Fang Low, Esther Cheng, Emlyn Lewis–Jones, Heather Orr, Rebecca Pulley, Gary Tiu, Patrick Wong.

Violas Kirrillie Abbott–Raymonde, Janice Buttle, Dana Kern, Philip Silver.

Violoncellos John Napier, Margaret Lazanas, Ian Macourt.

Bass Paul Laszlo.

Percussion Rebecca Clarke.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

dance and verse for strings

Bartók Rumanian Dances
Britten Serenade for tenor, horn and strings
Butterley Goldengrove
Warlock Capriol Suite

2.30 pm, Sunday 28 July 2002

Benjamin Britten's work features texts selected from diverse poets; Nigel Butterley's *Goldengrove*, while not including a role for the voice, was inspired by the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins. These two works are framed by Bartók's setting of Eastern European dances, and Warlock's evocation of an old French dance treatise.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

baroque and beyond: music for strings

Bach Brandenburg Concerto No. 3
Corelli Christmas Concerto
Vivaldi Spring, from *The Four Seasons*
Brumby The Phoenix and the Turtle
Villa–Lobos Bachianas Brasileiras No. 9
Respighi Ancient Airs and Dances: Suite No. 3

2.30 pm, Sunday 17 November 2002

Three well–loved works from the Baroque period precede Villa–Lobos' homage to Bach in Brazilian style, and Respighi's loving look at old Italian music. Brumby's piece for strings and harpsichord was inspired by Shakespeare's poem of the same name.

Programme details subject to change