THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

war and peace: music for strings

David Keeffe The Undone Years

Johanna Selleck Tapestry II

Pavel Haas Study for String Orchestra

Ernest Bloch Concerto Grosso No. 1

Jason Xanthoudakis, saxophone

David Angell, conductor

2.30 pm, Sunday 3 April 2011

St. Stephen's Church, Newtown

Welcome to the opening concert in the 2011 season of the Bourbaki Ensemble! We are delighted to be able to give the world premiere performance of *The Undone Years*, a concerto written by Melbourne composer David Keeffe for saxophonist Jason Xanthoudakis. Regular Bourbaki audiences will remember Jason from his performance of the Dubois concerto in 2007.

The inspiration for the concerto came from poems of Wilfred Owen, written during World War I. We have chosen to begin today's concert with a work from World War II. Amazingly, even the terrors of a Nazi concentration camp could not altogether stifle the creative instincts of composers such as Pavel Haas. Though Haas did not survive to see the downfall of the Nazis, his *Study for Strings* was preserved, and stands as a testament to the indestructibility of the human spirit. Ernest Bloch's *Concerto Grosso* was composed in 1925, and though not directly prompted by war is of a distinctly severe character, at least in its first and last movements. A complete change of mood is provided by Johanna Selleck's gentle *Tapestry II: Mellow*.

In our next concert we will be joined by outstanding young Australian recorder soloist Alana Blackburn: see the back cover of the programme for details. The third and final Bourbaki concert for 2011 will take place on 6 November and will feature great works from the early twentieth century: a string arrangement of the *Adagio* from Mahler's tenth symphony, and Elgar's *Introduction and Allegro*. This is a concert you will not want to miss! If you are not already a member of our mailing list, it is easy to join – just send an email to `david.355.113@gmail.com` to be sure of always receiving the earliest possible notification of Bourbaki concerts and other activities.

Thank you for attending today's concert! We trust that you will find the music exciting and thought–provoking, and we hope to see you again at future Bourbaki performances.

PROGRAMME

Pavel Haas Study for String Orchestra

Ernest Bloch Concerto Grosso No. 1 for String Orchestra with Piano Obbligato

1. Prelude
2. Dirge
3. Pastorale and Rustic Dances
4. Fugue

Prue Gibbs, piano

INTERVAL
20 minutes

Johanna Selleck Tapestry II: Mellow

David Keeffe The Undone Years

I The Undone Years
II The Old Lie
III Spring Winds
IV Legs as Quick as Lilac–shoots

Jason Xanthoudakis, saxophone

The years of World War II were surprisingly – or perhaps not surprisingly – rich in music by composers from many countries. Some of the works that appeared at this time bear direct references to contemporary events, as for example Tippett's *A Child of our Time* and Shostakovich's "Leningrad" Symphony; others, such as Richard Strauss's *Metamorphosen* (performed by the Bourbaki Ensemble in 2008), Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time* and Poulenc's *Figure Humaine*, offer a more generalised response to the terrors of the era.

The composers who were incarcerated in the Nazi concentration camp of Terezín (Theresienstadt) are less well known to the average concertgoer than those mentioned above. The reasons for this are obvious: few of the prisoners, and little of their music, survived the conflict. Some scores, however, were preserved, and some were reconstructed from fragmentary sources. Research into the music of Terezín continues to the present day.

Some of the music composed in Terezín was, understandably, a deeply felt reaction to the composer's awful surroundings; some, most notably Viktor Ullman's one–act opera *Der Kaiser von Atlantis*, was starkly satirical in nature. Some, rather strangely, showed no great discontinuity with the composer's pre–war work. To this last category belongs the *Study for String Orchestra* by **Pavel Haas**.

Haas was born in 1899 into a Jewish family in the Moravian town of Brno, then part of the Austro–Hungarian empire. He studied there at the Conservatorium, becoming a pupil of Leoš Janáček. The elder composer had a significant influence on Haas, not so much in the imposition of his own personal style but in the derivation of that style from the elements of Moravian folk music. In the 1920s and 1930s Haas wrote a good deal of orchestral and chamber music, as well as film and theatre scores; there was also an opera *The Charlatan*. In 1941 Haas was arrested by the Nazis and deported to Terezín. At first, suffering from ill health and depression, he took no part in musical life, but with the encouragement of Gideon Klein he eventually returned to composition.

The thematic material of Haas's *Study for String Orchestra* is based on the characteristic intervals of Moravian folk music. The work begins by establishing vigorous rhythmic patterns in the violas and cellos, soon joined by basses and second violins. This section, however, turns out to be merely an accompaniment to the first main theme. Announced in the first violins, the theme cuts uncompromisingly across the regular accents of the accompaniment and appears to be in a different metre altogether. A fugal section begins in the violas, slightly slower in tempo but perhaps even more forceful and energetic than the opening. The central episode of the *Study* is an *Adagio* of great intensity. After a section in which lyrical passages for violas alternating with first violins are surrounded by a delicate accompaniment, the opening textures resume. Frequent startling varations of metre lead to a powerful conclusion.

The *Study* was composed in 1943 and performed in Terezín in September 1944. In October of that year Pavel Haas was transported to Auschwitz–Birkenau, where he was murdered.

The music and the life of **Ernest Bloch** (1880–1959) both fall into two complementary parts. Born in Geneva, he studied violin with the great Belgian virtuoso Eugène Ysaÿe and composition at the Brussels Conservatoire. Much of his early music drew deeply on his Jewish heritage: between 1911 and 1918 he wrote a series of major pieces which include *Schelomo* for cello and orchestra and the *Israel* Symphony, and which collectively are often known as Bloch's "Jewish Cycle". In 1916 he emigrated to America where, essentially, he was based for the rest of his life (though an endowment enabled him to return to Europe for most of the 1930s); while he continued to write works such as the *Avodath Hakodesh* (Sacred Service), he sought in much of his later composition to produce music which was less specifically Jewish and more oriented towards American or international culture.

Music for strings forms an important part of Bloch's catalogue. Among his instrumental works is a short piece, *Abodah*, for violin and piano, written in 1929 for the twelve–year–old Yehudi Menuhin; almost thirty years later, two suites for unaccompanied violin were also written for Menuhin. These suites, as well as three for cello and one for viola (left unfinished), came from the last three years or so of Bloch's life. There are also five string quartets, a violin concerto (1938) composed for Joseph Szigeti, and the two *Concerti Grossi* for string orchestra.

The *Concerto Grosso No. 1* augments the strings with an obbligato piano. The instrument plays a dual role, for the most part supporting the strings somewhat in the manner of an updated keyboard continuo, but also enjoying the occasional prominent solo. The striking and rhythmic opening of the first movement is a case in point: initially the piano doubles the strings, adding a percussive attack to the texture, while after a minute or so the same material is given to the piano alone, accompanied by firmly sustained *unisons* in the orchestra.

The second movement, entitled *Dirge*, begins in a manner reminiscent of a funeral march (despite its rhythm of three beats to the bar!). A radiant central section is scored for four solo violins, accompanied by solo viola, lower strings and piano. There is no break between this movement and the third, *Pastorale and Rustic Dances*. The latter might be described as a collage of the elements mentioned in the title. Listeners may care to picture themselves in a quiet rural setting, gradually becoming aware of distant sounds of merriment from a village fair. Dance tunes of various characters soon come to predominate, culminating in a gentle tune in the style of a folk song (definitely not a dance) given to violas in four parts. The "pastoral" music and the dances resume; but it is the viola theme, grandly scored for the full ensemble, with which the movement ends.

The finale is the movement which, above any of the others, justifies Bloch's title of *Concerto Grosso* for his work. It is a fugue, and to a considerable extent obeys the accepted rules of that form. The subject is first announced by violas, answered by second violins; subsequent entries involve cellos and basses, first violins, and, finally, the piano. Later it is given in augmentation, in inversion and in stretto; there are episodes of various kinds, some involving brief solos for individual players. The pedal point which brings the work to a powerful conclusion is among the most traditional of baroque fugal devices.

Johanna Selleck (born 1959) is a composer, flautist, and musicologist based in Melbourne. Her works have been performed by orchestras and choirs throughout Australia, and over the last two decades have received awards both at home and overseas. In 2006 Johanna not only completed a Ph. D. in composition at Melbourne University but also won first prize in the Albert H. Maggs Composition Award for Australian Composers. The latter award resulted in a commission for Johanna to write *Four Tapestries* for string orchestra. In 2010, a grant from Arts Victoria enabled her to collaborate with the internationally renowned harmonica player, Corky Siegel, in the creation of a new concerto for blues harmonica.

Each movement of *Four Tapestries* has its own subtitle. Performance of individual movements is sanctioned by the composer: today we present *Tapestry II: Mellow*. Johanna has written that "*Four Tapestries* explores ideas about texture, colour and mood through an economy of means. The aim was to be simple and direct in expression... In the second movement, which is serene and painted in 'mellow' colours, melody and line become... prominent". The movement opens with interwoven arpeggiated lines of violins, violas and cellos, a strikingly apt musical equivalent of a tapestry. A later theme, beginning with a rising fifth in basses alone, soon develops into a duet between basses and violas; the central section of the work consists of a meditative cello solo. With the return of the full orchestra the music soon reaches a *fortissimo* passage with demisemiquavers in the accompaniment, suggesting an ever more intricate and richly textured tapestry. The instruments drop out one part at a time as the movement ends in peace and tranquillity.

Based on material kindly supplied by the composer.

At age 6, **David Keeffe** met Benjamin Britten, and shook his hand. Perhaps it was inevitable that he would, eventually, become a composer. David was born into a musical family in London. After studies with John Tavener at Trinity College of Music he moved to the University of York, intending to continue his composition work but for reasons that are still unclear, the muse departed; instead he developed an interest in computers and their musical applications, while continuing to play the horn and to conduct. In 1997 David took an opportunity to live and work in Australia with his wife, Catherine, and their two daughters. With a young family starting their own musical journey, and with Catherine's encouragement, the scene was set for the muse's return. A stream of new works for various ensembles appeared, and were presented in workshops and performances by Oakleigh City Band, Maroondah Symphony Orchestra, the Grainger Wind Symphony and Melbourne Youth Music's MYO and MYSB, all of whose support is gratefully acknowledged. In 2006 David won the prize for *The Eleventh Day*, a new slow march for brass band at the Melbourne International Festival of Brass. That inspired him to return to study, and in 2010 he completed his Master of Music in composition at the University of Melbourne, working with Julian Yu, who has been a great encouragement. David has also had works played by the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, the Defence Force School of Music Band and the Guildhall School of Music Horn Choir.

In 2009 Jason Xanthoudakis invited me to write him a saxophone concerto and I very happily accepted. With its dark lower register and penetrating sound, I chose the tenor sax for the solo part. "The Undone Years" is a line from *Strange Meeting* by the WWI poet Wilfred Owen. The unrestrained imagery of Owen's poetry brings home his first–hand experience of the horrors of the Great War. The resulting work is of dark contrasts, exploring the idea of "what might have been", whether death and destruction or renewed life. The bittersweet first movement *The Undone Years* combines fragments of wistfulness, urgency and restlessness with a look forwards to what is coming. In the second movement *The Old Lie*, a setting of *Dulce et Decorum est*, the solo line closely follows the words, the accompaniment illustrating Owen's horrifying imagery. *Spring Wind* is an extended soliloquy for the saxophone, with nature sounds and large gestures, looking towards renewal. The energetic last movement *Legs as Quick as Lilac–shoots* displays a recovered liveliness, yet with wistful memories of earlier times.

Programme note courtesy of the composer.

David Angell, conductor

David conducts the Bourbaki Ensemble and Orchestra 143 (a chamber orchestra based in Turramurra); plays viola in numerous orchestras and chamber groups; co–wrote and conducted the soundtrack for the film *Compost Monster*, which has been screened in Sydney and London; has acted as conductor or pit muso in numerous musical theatre productions; appears with Bourbaki on three CDs released by Wirripang; is the editor of a revised score of the *Concerto for Strings* by Margaret Sutherland; has contributed translations of Russian and Italian poetry to the *Lied and Art Song Texts* website… and more!

Jason Xanthoudakis, saxophone

Jason studied saxophone at Melbourne University (where he has recently graduated with a Master of Music), at the Victorian College of the Arts with Phillip Miechel, Ian Godfrey, Peter Clinch and Terry Noone, and at the Sydney Conservatorium with Mark Walton and James Nightingale.

He has a busy performance schedule including performances with the AOBO, SSO, TSO and MSO, as well as frequent solo recitals around Australia. He has performed live broadcast recitals on 2MBS–FM, has recorded for ABC Classic FM, and has been broadcast on 3MBS–FM, winning the 3MBS Performer of the Year Award in 2000.

In 2002 he performed the Ibert *Concertino da Camera* with the Melbourne Youth Orchestra and won the VCA concerto competition; in 2005 he won the University of Melbourne Faculty of Music concerto competition (wind/voice section).

Jason is very active in the field of contemporary music: several composers have dedicated works to him, and in 2004 he gave the world premieres of six new works for saxophone. See Jason's website at `www.xansax.com` for more information.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

The Bourbaki Ensemble is a string orchestra based at St. Stephen's Church, Newtown. Formed in 2001, the Ensemble is strongly committed to playing music of the present century, and in 2011 performs Australian music by Derek Davies, Ross Edwards, Stephen Cronin, David Keeffe, Johanna Selleck and Colin Spiers.

Charles Denis Sauter Bourbaki (1816–1897) was a leading figure in French military circles at the time of the Franco–Prussian war. He was the author of an extensive corpus of verse describing the suffering of those under his command, especially during their period of internment in Switzerland. Connoisseurs have seen in his *oeuvre* a direct influence upon the poets of the First World War. Bourbaki felt, however, that publication of this work under his own name would be incompatible with his responsibilities as a general. It therefore appeared under a *nom–de–plume*, and few readers are even aware of its existence.

Violins Emlyn Lewis–Jones, Kathryn Crossing, Clare Blakemore, Mark Chambers, Elizabeth Cooney, Steven Harvey, Deborah McGowan, Shaun Stewart, Justin White, Richard Willgoss.

Violas Kathryn Ramsay, Derek Davies, Nicole Greentree, Paul Hoskinson, Kate Hughes.

Violoncellos Nicholas Thomas, Clare Kahn, Gabrielle Williams.

Basses Caitlin Cahill, Mark Szeto.

Timpani Jane Makeham.

Piano Prue Gibbs.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

crossing borders: music for strings

Sally Beamish The Day Dawn
Errollyn Wallen Photography
Stephen Cronin Suite for recorder and strings
Ross Edwards Chorale and Ecstatic Dance
Henryk Gorecki Three Pieces in Olden Style
Derek Davies India

Alana Blackburn, recorder

2.30 pm, Sunday 7 August 2011
St. Stephen's Church, Newtown

Tickets $25, concessions $15

Errollyn Wallen and Sally Beamish are two of the rising stars of British music. Wallen, born in Belize, studied in New York and now makes the UK her home. *Photography*, sometimes Latin and jazzy, sometimes English and pastoral, has attracted wide acclaim since its premiere in 2006. Giving up a flourishing career in London as a freelance violist, Beamish moved to Scotland where she now devotes herself to composition. *The Day Dawn* is based on a Shetland fiddle tune with which the islanders would greet the winter solstice.

Crossing a few more borders, we present Derek Davies' musical impressions of India and Henryk Gorecki's evocation of old music from his native Poland. Leading Australian composer Ross Edwards' *Chorale and Ecstatic Dance* combines the meditative and the dance–like moods which underlie so much of his music.

Further information 0433074322 or `www.bourbakiensemble.org`

Programme details subject to change