THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

crossing borders: music for strings

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

Alana Blackburn, recorder
David Angell, conductor

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

Welcome to this year's Bourbaki Ensemble winter concert! We are excited to present two strongly contrasting recent compositions from outstanding modern British composers. Errollyn Wallen's *Photography* is dazzlingly eclectic in its combination of motoric rhythms, haunting solos, dramatic sound effects and jazzlike syncopation, while Sally Beamish chooses to explore the implications of a relatively limited soundworld in her evocative and deeply affecting *The Day Dawn*. We are not aware that either of these works has been performed previously in Australia. The concert will also include a "modern classic" from the pen of Henryk Górecki, one of the leading Polish composers of his generation, who passed away late last year.

Our regular audiences will be familiar with Bourbaki's dedication to the cause of Australian music. Today's programme features three Australian works, two of them a couple of decades old and the third receiving its world premiere. Ross Edwards' *Chorale and Ecstatic Dance* is an important part of the Australian repertoire for strings; Stephen Cronin's *Suite for recorder and strings* is less well known. To play the solo role in the suite we are delighted to welcome Alana Blackburn, whose status as one of Australia's most talented young recorder players was confirmed by her first place in the recent Don Cowell Recorder Competition in Melbourne. Derek Davies, a member of the Bourbaki Ensemble, will play the *obbligato* viola part in the first performance of his own composition *India, prelude for string orchestra*.

Don't forget that the Bourbaki website now contains a selection of recordings from our recent concerts. There is a complete performance of Ralph Vaughan Williams' magnificent *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*, as well as music by Wilcher, Oliveiro and Sköld. Simply go to `www.bourbakiensemble.org` and download the files, or hear them online. Happy listening!

PROGRAMME

Errollyn Wallen *Photography* for string orchestra

I Vivace
II Quite slow
III Slow, trance–like
IV Moderato

Derek Davies India, prelude for string orchestra

Derek Davies, viola

Ross Edwards Chorale and Ecstatic Dance

I. Chorale
II. Ecstatic Dance

Stephen Cronin Suite for Recorder and Strings, *Homage to Vaughan Williams*

Alana Blackburn, recorder

INTERVAL
20 minutes

Sally Beamish The Day Dawn

Henryk Górecki Three Pieces in Olden Style

One of the most highly acclaimed British composers to emerge in the first decade of this century, **Errollyn Wallen** is noted both as a singer–songwriter of popular music and as a composer of concert music, art song and opera. She was born in 1958 in what was then the Crown Colony of British Honduras and is now the nation of Belize. (Located on the Caribbean coast of Central America, Belize gained independence in 1981. It is curiously similar to Australia in that it retains the British monarch as head of state, represented locally by a governor–general.) Errollyn trained at the Dance Theater of Harlem in New York before turning to composition, studying at the universities of London and Cambridge.

Photography was commissioned in 2006 by the Orchestra of the Swan, an ensemble based in Stratford–upon–Avon, England. It opens with an energetically rhythmic movement enlivened by offbeat accents and frequent dislocations of the metre. The second movement begins as a trio for solo violin, viola and cello which starts out almost in baroque style, gradually metamorphosing into a more complex polytonal texture. The movement concludes with a chorale–like passage for the full ensemble.

Another slow movement ensues. Violins and violas, divided into six parts, establish an intricate polyrhythmic web which turns out to be the hushed and mysterious accompaniment to a haunting cello solo. Dramatic rumblings and *glissandi* introduce the climactic conclusion. In contrast, the finale begins gently with a "singing" theme in divided first violins. An increase in tempo midway through the movement leads to a rhythmic and exciting finish.

Derek Davies is a Sydney–based freelance violinist, violist, composer and arranger. He played violin and viola with the ABC Sinfonia from 1983 to 1986, and in 1987 he formed one of Sydney's premier music groups *The Penguins*. After many thousands of performances in Australia and overseas, they continue to attract new audiences. *The Penguins* have recorded three CDs: *Freestyle*, *In the Mall* and *Ice Breaker*. Derek has been a member of the Bourbaki Ensemble for a number of years.

In 1990 Derek composed a body of work inspired by his girlfriend Jill's travels in India. The prelude *India* featured on his 1997 CD *Caravans*. Derek and Jill (now his wife) have since travelled throughout India together. This concert is the premiere of an arrangement of the prelude for string orchestra with obbligato viola. Derek is grateful to David Angell for encouraging him to arrange this work for the Bourbaki Ensemble.

The music of **Ross Edwards** (born 1943) seeks to access the very essence of existence. It celebrates the natural world in its self–sufficiency and wholeness, while also exploring the fundamental human impulses of song and dance. To achieve his aims the composer has recourse to a number of devices, among them drones, the sounds of birds and insects, and a lively dance–like texture influenced by African and Asian sources. Among Ross's best known orchestral compositions are the Symphony No. 1 *Da Pacem Domine*, described as "a massive orchestral chant of quiet intensity"; the violin concerto *Maninyas* written for Dene Olding; and the oboe concerto *Bird Spirit Dreaming* for Diana Doherty. His *Dawn Mantras* was composed for performance on the sails of the Sydney Opera House at sunrise on 1 January 2000 and was televised to an estimated two billion people around the world.

The *Chorale and Ecstatic Dance* for string orchestra (1993, revised 2000) may be heard as an aural equivalent of the two great canvasses *Music* and *Dance* of Henri Matisse. The *Chorale* begins with a drone, cellos establishing a mood of deep and meditative serenity before the upper parts enter in quiet melodic lines. Occasional metric irregularities distantly suggest the austere spirit of plainchant, an austerity underlined by the tendency of the harmony to rely on intervals of fifths and sevenths. After a more warmly scored section in which thirds, hitherto to some extent avoided, play a greater role, the opening chorale returns.

The main musical impulse of the *Ecstatic Dance* which constitutes the second movement is the contrast between different groupings of six quavers: two groups of three and three groups of two. The quietly joyful first section gives way to more vigorous episodes, and a reprise of the first part leads to a repetitive and almost hypnotic coda.

Often viewed solely as an archaic instrument, the recorder in fact boasts a considerable modern repertoire, originating in countries from Albania to Zimbabwe. Composers writing for recorder within the last century or so include such eminent names as Benjamin Britten, Malcolm Arnold and Paul Hindemith from the earlier part of the era, and more recently Luciano Berio, John Cage, Arvo Pärt, George Crumb and even Leonard Bernstein. Among the many Australian contributions to the repertoire should be mentioned those of Elena Kats–Chernin, Nigel Butterley, Ross Edwards and **Stephen Cronin**.

Cronin's *Suite for recorder and strings* was composed in 1983 and first performed by John Martin with the strings of the Queensland Symphony Orchestra. The soloist is introduced by a brief string passage whose typical motives are firm but not overstated. The texture of the music is distinctly neoclassical, with angular lines and "sideslipping" harmonies. After a minute or so, *pizzicato* strings support a more sustained recorder theme which will be of continued importance both in this movement and in the last.

If it is not apparent from the first movement why Cronin should have subtitled his work “homage to Vaughan Williams”, this becomes abundantly clear in the second. Throughout the movement, both soloist and orchestra are given themes which in their profound yet simple expressivity bring to mind some of the older composer’s most inspired music. The finale returns to the livelier feel of the first movement, beginning as a fugue with successive entries in recorder, first violins, cellos and finally second violins with violas. The performers (not to mention the listeners) are kept on their toes by the irregular alternation of bars seven, eight and nine quavers in length. The fugue returns as the work proceeds to its concise and uncomplicated ending.

Born in Brisbane in 1960, Stephen Cronin has written much choral music (notably *Carmina Pu!*, a setting of Winnie–the–Pooh in Latin) as well as chamber and orchestral works. He has the rare distinction of having won in the same year (1991) two of Australia’s major awards for composition, the Albert H. Maggs Award and the Paul Lowin Song Cycle Prize. Since 1986 Stephen Cronin has been a member of the composition staff at the Queensland Conservatorium.

Sally Beamish (1956–) began her musical career as a violist. After completing studies in Manchester and Germany, she made a name for herself as a member of the Academy of St. Martin–in–the–Fields, the London Sinfonietta and other leading British ensembles. Towards the end of the 1980s her longstanding but hitherto little realised interest in composition began to reassert itself. She moved from London to Scotland and soon became one of the most sought–after composers in Britain. Her catalogue of works now includes two symphonies; three viola concertos as well as concertos for violin, trumpet, accordion and other instruments; numerous instrumental and chamber works; music for amateurs and children. She has had close associations with both the Scottish and the Swedish Chamber Orchestras, and many of her compositions have been recorded and released on the Swedish BIS label.

The Day Dawn was commissioned by the British organisation *Contemporary Music–Making for Amateurs* for its 1997 summer school. It is in eleven parts and is flexibly organised so as to be performable by variously constituted ensembles: three lines are designated "upper", three "middle" and four "lower", underpinned by a specific bass part. The performers have a degree of freedom in allocating the parts to violins, violas and cellos; in today's performance we have four violin lines, three viola, three cello and bass.

Two ideas underlie *The Day Dawn*. The first is a traditional Shetland fiddle tune with which the islanders would mark the winter solstice and welcome the lengthening days. The symbolic new beginning of the cycle of seasons also recalls the bright sunshine which greeted a friend of the composer on the day of her young daughter's funeral. The music begins with sustained lines of independent contour, entering one by one from bass to treble, in a passage which suggests the slow swell of the Shetland seascape gradually becoming visible in the light of day. Eventually the parts coalesce into a more chordal texture before dying away, farewelled by a freely floating violin solo. The tempo increases and the texture becomes more active, leading into the first full statement of the fiddle tune. A more relaxed section accelerates once again into a fierce *presto* and another statement of the tune, which abruptly dissolves into a reprise of the opening seascape. The work ends with the fiddle tune one last time, played by a solo violin and sparsely accompanied.

Henryk Górecki (1933–2010) enjoyed a career whose trajectory appears almost to provide a synopsis of European musical thought from the 1950s onwards – though sometimes not in chronological order! His compositions from the 1950s are said to reflect the influence of Boulez and other post–war modernists; from the early 1960s, that of Webern and Xenakis. In 1958, however, the first public performances of his music apparently brought to mind the works of Bartók and Szymanowski, which typically belong to the 1920s and 1930s. Further influences in the 1960s were Messaien and Stockhausen, though it is unlikely that listeners will hear anything of these composers in the 1963 *Three Pieces in Olden Style*: this work seems as if it should belong to the 1970s or later, when Górecki was turning to the European minimalist style exemplified by Arvo Pärt and John Tavener. His most successful composition, the *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs*, was written in 1976 and consists of three slow movements for soprano and large string orchestra.

All this is rather confusing. Perhaps the safest conclusion (which is also consistent with his own comments) is to describe Górecki as a composer who was always determined to follow his own path and to choose at any time the style that seemed to him most appropriate.

The *Three Pieces* attempt to locate Górecki's music in his own national idiom. They employ simple themes supported by harmonies which, though "technically" dissonant, are used principally to establish a mood of mystery and antiquity. The closing bars of the final piece provide a magnificent example of the sonority which can be drawn from the string orchestra.

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; 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!

Alana Blackburn, recorder

Fresh back from Europe, Alana Blackburn has been hailed as a rising star in recorder performance. A graduate of both the Sydney and Amsterdam Conservatoriums with Bachelor's and Master's degrees, Alana specialises in both early and contemporary repertoire, performing works spanning over 500 years. An international career has seen Alana perform in some of the world's greatest recital halls including the Wigmore Hall (UK), Konzerthaus Berlin, Het Concertgebouw Amsterdam and the Sydney Opera House. Alana has performed with a number of notable ensembles including The Royal Wind Music, The New Dutch Academy, Salut! Baroque, The Bell Shakespeare Company and The Sydney Consort. She has recorded three CDs with the Royal Wind Music as well as performing live on radio broadcasts in Sydney, New Zealand, Germany and The Netherlands. A former student of Hans–Dieter Michatz, Paul Leenhouts and Jorge Isaac, Alana has also had lessons with leading recorder virtuosi Walter van Hauwe, Han Tol and the late Gerd Lünenbürger. Most recently, Alana was a winner of the Open Section of the Don Cowell Memorial Trust Recorder Competition held in Melbourne in July 2011.

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.

In 1839 the young Charles Denis Sauter Bourbaki (1816–1897), later an important figure in the Franco–Prussian War, visited Scotland, following in the decade–old footsteps of his idol Felix Mendelssohn. Extending Mendelssohn's itinerary from the Hebrides to take in the Shetland Islands, he became entranced by the local folk music and traditional crafts. Upon returning to France, Bourbaki was determined to promote Scottish culture, and published a collection of Shetland fiddle tunes and knitting patterns. Sadly, the work appeared at a time when, for a brief period, the French government did not wish to antagonise England by appearing to support Scottish nationalism; as a result the entire print run was guillotined. No copies have survived.

Violins Alastair Duff–Forbes, Steven Harvey, Samantha Boston, Elizabeth Cooney, Greta Lee, Emlyn Lewis–Jones, Deborah McGowan, Shaun Stewart, Justin White, Richard Willgoss [viola in *The Day Dawn*].

Violas Kathryn Ramsay, Derek Davies, Kate Hughes, Michelle Urquhart.

Violoncellos Nicholas Thomas, Michael Bowrey, Ian Macourt, Gabrielle Williams.

Basses Sasha Marker, Jeremy Burrows.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

late romantics: music for strings

Mahler *Adagio* from Symphony No. 10
Elgar Introduction and Allegro
Enescu Deux Intermèdes
Colin Spiers Arc of Infinity

2.30 pm, Sunday 6 November 2011
St. Stephen's Church, Newtown

The Bourbaki Ensemble concludes its 2011 season with a tribute to Gustav Mahler in the centenary year of his death. German conductor Hans Stadlmair's adaptation of the opening *Adagio* from Mahler's unfinished tenth symphony, scored for strings in fifteen parts, is an audacious project but not an unreasonable one: in Mahler's original the strings bear a great deal of the musical argument, notably the lengthy opening theme given to unaccompanied violas.

The programme also includes Elgar's *Introduction and Allegro* for string orchestra and string quartet. Its typically Elgarian contrast of vigour and lyricism make it one of the masterpieces of the English string repertoire. George Enescu's *Intermèdes* date from within a couple of years of the Elgar.

Colin Spiers is a Newcastle composer whose *Music, like the dark husk of earth, abiding* was performed by Bourbaki in 2003. *Arc of Infinity*, written in 2006, is a gentle and contemplative composition for string orchestra.

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