THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

concertante strings

Peter Sculthorpe Port Essington

Herbert Howells Elegy

Aaron Kenny Chernobyl

Eugène Ysaÿe Harmonies du soir

Anton Bruckner Adagio

Alastair Duff–Forbes, violin

Michelle Urquhart, viola

David Angell, conductor

2.30 pm, Sunday 28 October 2012

Hunter Baillie Memorial Presbyterian Church

Welcome to the final Bourbaki Ensemble concert in 2012! Yet again we are proud to present the premiere performance of a new Australian work written especially for our concert. Aaron Kenny's *Chernobyl*, composed at the request of soloist Alastair Duff–Forbes, is a concerto for violin and strings conceived as a tribute to those who suffered the consequences of the destruction of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in the USSR in 1986. Two slow movements portray the peaceful setting of the tragedy and the eerie aftermath, while the central section depicts the explosion itself. (In view of Leichhardt's proud history as a nuclear–free zone, this is presumably the only atomic meltdown you will ever hear within the municipal boundaries. . .)

Our concert is built around works written for string orchestra alongside smaller ensembles. The magical *Harmonies du soir* of Eugène Ysaÿe combines quartet and orchestra, while Herbert Howells' *Elegy* adds a solo viola to the mix. Peter Sculthorpe's *Port Essington* employs two violins and cello, chosen by the composer as an allusion to the trio for the same instruments by John Phillip Deane, which was first performed in 1845 and is the first piece of chamber music known to have been composed in Australia. It is easy to imagine that it may have been taken to the remote Northern Territory and played over by the homesick European inhabitants of the seemingly hostile environment.

In the Bourbaki Ensemble it is always enjoyable – if sometimes terrifying – to study new or unfamiliar works. It is fascinating to spend time in rehearsal making sense of the notes and gradually coming to understand how *music* arises from those notes. Nevertheless, we still need an audience to hear the final results! (Or should we be more modest and say, "the provisional results"?) So, whether you have been attending Bourbaki performances for many years or only for a short time, we thank you for your support, and trust that you will enjoy the concert.

PROGRAMME

Peter Sculthorpe Port Essington

Paul Pokorny, violin
Emlyn Lewis–Jones, violin
Bronwen Whyatt, cello

Herbert Howells Elegy for viola, string quartet and string orchestra

Michelle Urquhart, viola

Greta Lee, violin
Richard Willgoss, violin
Kathryn Ramsay, viola
Catherine Willis, cello

Eugène Ysaÿe Harmonies du Soir, Op. 31

Paul Pokorny, violin
Derek Davies, violin
Michelle Urquhart, viola
Bronwen Whyatt, cello

INTERVAL
20 minutes

Aaron Kenny Chernobyl

Alastair Duff–Forbes, violin

Anton Bruckner Adagio from the String Quintet in F major, version for string orchestra

Many of the works of **Peter Sculthorpe** (born 1929) have been closely inspired by the composer's native land – its landscape, its environment, the relations between its indigenous and non–indigenous inhabitants. While some of Peter's compositions approach these issues in general terms, *Port Essington*, dating from 1977, is quite specific in its references to time and place. The work depicts in musical language the failed attempt to establish a settlement on the southern shore of the Cobourg Peninsula (the most northerly part of the Northern Territory mainland) in the first half of the nineteenth century. The contrast between the settlement and the environment is evoked by the use of a string trio, consisting of two violins and cello, alongside the string orchestra. The trio is given music of a style which one can easily imagine being played "at home" by amateur musicians of the Victorian era, while the orchestral music alternates between a fierce, ritualistic texture and evocations of birdsong and the croaking of frogs. Despite their contrasting effects, both parts are based upon the same theme, an Arnhem Land chant known as *Djilile*, "whistling duck on a billabong". By and large, the two planes of the music interact neither in sympathy nor in opposition, though towards the end of the piece they join together, "suggesting that some kind of agreement could have been possible" [composer's note].

Port Essington is comprised of six sections, played without a break. *Prologue: The Bush* opens the work with forceful and rhythmic music for the full string orchestra, eventually fading and slowing down as the second part, *Theme and Variations: The Settlement* begins. Here the trio enunciates a "Victorian" version of the main theme and begins to play variations upon it in best "drawing room" style. Gradually the orchestra begins to add commentary: one imagines the inhabitants of the bush peering after dark through the windows of the dwellings and observing, with curiosity but without malice, the well–lit music–making. In *Phantasy: Unrest* the orchestra evokes the sounds of the bush, before *Nocturnal: Estrangement* re-introduces the trio. A mournful cello theme is gradually overtaken by the orchestra, which returns to a faster and even more ferocious version of the music from the very beginning of the work. A solo bass leads into the fifth section, *Arietta: Farewell*, where the trio's nostalgic retreat is joined by the orchestra before the concluding *Epilogue: The Bush* establishes an atmosphere of peace and solitude.

The premiere of Ralph Vaughan Williams' *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*, at the Three Choirs Festival of 1910 in Gloucester Cathedral, must have been a striking experience for many in the audience, though perhaps none was as deeply affected as a certain young man from the nearby town of Lydney. **Herbert Howells** (1892–1983) was already beginning to earn the respect of his elders as a competent musician, but it was this particular evening that he was frequently to recall in later life as the event which revealed to him his vocation as a composer. Of Howells' works inspired by the Vaughan Williams, one of the first – and the most directly inspired – was his *Elegy* for viola, string quartet and string orchestra. Not only is the instrumentation comparable with that of the older work (scored for string quartet and two string orchestras), but so too is the overall effect, which seems to call for the sonority provided by a church or cathedral acoustic.

If the inspiration for the *Elegy* was the *Tallis Fantasia*, its motivation was the death in 1916 of Francis Purcell Warren, one of over forty students and graduates of the Royal College of Music, London, to be killed in action during the First World War.

The *Elegy* was first performed at the Mons Memorial Concert in the Royal Albert Hall in 1917. Warren had been a student of the viola, and Howells later stated that his intention had been to write a work recalling Warren's personality rather than a "heroic" piece of wartime music. Harmonically, the *Elegy* is notable for the ambiguity of its tonality: the unaccompanied viola theme which opens the work seems to hover uncertainly between E♭ major and C minor, while its second appearance ends with an abrupt turn to the remote key of E minor. Later passages continue to oscillate between the major and minor modes. Only at the very end of the work is the matter finally decided by a hushed, consolatory chord of C major.

Perhaps the greatest violinist of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, **Eugène Ysaÿe** (1858–1931) was born in Liège, Belgium, and studied there under Henryk Wieniawski and Henri Vieuxtemps. Upon graduating from the Liège Conservatoire he took up the post of principal violin with the Benjamin Bilse beer–hall orchestra: though not, possibly, a very prestigious ensemble at the time, the orchestra later developed, partly as a consequence of its association with Ysaÿe, into the renowned Berlin Philharmonic. Ysaÿe soon embarked upon a wide–ranging solo career. He was especially known for his interpretations of contemporary repertoire, and the leading composers of the day, particularly those from the French–speaking world, seem to have been virtually falling over each other in their eagerness to write music for him. César Franck wrote his violin sonata in 1886 as a wedding present for the violinist and his bride (Ysaÿe performed the piece at the wedding celebration after receiving the score only that morning!) and Debussy, Saint–Saëns and Chausson also dedicated works to Ysaÿe.

In later life, Ysaÿe's career as a soloist was curtailed by failing health, and he turned increasingly to conducting and composition. His *Harmonies du Soir* was composed in 1927. Scored for solo string quartet together with string orchestra, the work evokes the atmosphere of a peaceful evening, ending as the last light of the post–sunset sky disappears. Throughout the course of the piece, ravishing melodies for both quartet and orchestra meander through a chromatic landscape which recalls the favourite composers of Ysaÿe's youth. Sometimes dark, sometimes radiant, the harmonies suggest a musical equivalent of a slightly blurred photograph. Ultimately, however, the music attains its goal of a serene and unclouded A flat major.

Aaron Kenny is a multi–award winning Australian film and concert composer. After graduating with Honours from the Elder Conservatorium of Music at the University of Adelaide and receiving the Alex Burhard Scholarship for Composition, he went on to win the 2MBS Young Composer of the Year Award, in 2009 and again in 2011, and the APRA Encouragement Award in 2010. Aaron completed his postgraduate studies in Screen Music at the prestigious Australian Film, Television and Radio School in Sydney.

Aaron has just returned from the United States after receiving the American Film Music Foundation Scholarship to attend the 2012 ASCAP Film Music Summer Workshop at New York University. He has also won a scholarship to return to New York and complete his Masters in Composition, and is trying to raise support for associated costs. You can see and hear more about it at `www.pozible.com/kennyinnyc`.

Aaron's works have been performed in concert by orchestras and ensembles around Australia, the United States and

Europe; he was most recently a winning grand finalist in the International Fanfare Competition for the 25th Anniversary of the Orquestra Simfònica del Vallès, premiering in Barcelona, Spain. His film scores have been heard both locally and internationally, the music for *Moth* having been nominated for Best Original Score at the 2012 St. Kilda Film Festival.

Chernobyl, for violin and string orchestra, was written especially for the Bourbaki Ensemble and soloist Alastair Duff–Forbes. The composer describes it as "a reflection of the tragedy of the events that took place at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in 1986, using a mixture of rhythm, harmony and haunting melody to express innocence, atomic energy, and death."

On the eve of 25 April 1986, the Chernobyl nuclear power plant suffered a catastrophic accident. An explosion and fire released into the atmosphere large quantities of radioactivity, which spread over much of Europe and western USSR. The battle to contain the contamination and avert a greater tragedy ultimately involved half a million workers. This piece is dedicated to them. The first of the three parts, *Nightfall on Prypiat*, is a melodic, folk–like section, which uses modal construction to create a peaceful calm before the imminent catastrophe. *Proton Accelerator* is largely textural and rhythmic, building to the giant overload and explosion in the reactor. Its fugal structure makes use of octatonic scales. The concluding *Exclusion Zone* is a hymn–like dirge which mourns the fallen, and those who would suffer deformities for many years after on account of the nuclear fallout and radiation.

Anton Bruckner (1824–1896) is best known to concert audiences as the composer of a series of majestic symphonies scored for large orchestra. His admiration for Wagner led to his music being heard as a symphonic equivalent of that composer's extended music dramas, but also made Bruckner an easy target for the anti–Wagner faction, led by critic Eduard Hanslick, in Viennese musical circles, and earned him some influential enemies which he had done nothing to deserve. Bruckner also wrote numerous choral works; his chamber music, on the other hand, consists (apart from some youthful works, later discarded) of just one composition, the String Quintet in F major from 1879.

The *Adagio* of the quintet possesses a combination of serenity and emotional depth by virtue of which it ranks alongside some of the great slow movements of Bruckner's symphonies. If there are moments at which the composer seems to forget that he is writing for five instruments and to have, rather, a full orchestra in mind, this is a fault which is easily remedied by giving the work to multiple strings. The movement is built around two themes: the first, heard in the first violins at the very outset, sustained, expressive and descending in contour; the second given initially to the first violas, its more assertive rising line undercut within the first three notes by a change from major to minor harmonies. Both, occasionally, are abandoned as Bruckner loses himself in purely harmonic textures sometimes reminiscent of archaic choral writing. The *coda*, woven around continual arpeggios in the second violins, fades to utter silence.

Throughout his life, from his upbringing in rural Austria to his eventual (and somewhat discomforting) success in Vienna, Bruckner retained an unshakeable devotion to his Catholic faith. Besides the instrumental works already mentioned, his compositional output includes three masses, a *Te Deum* and a large number of smaller choral works, often with organ or brass accompaniment. It is perhaps no accident that the beginning of the hymnlike *Adagio* from his string quintet fits perfectly the words *Kyrie eleison* from the Latin text of the Mass.

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 three recordings released on CD by Wirripang, and in numerous concerts recorded for broadcast on 2MBS–FM. Since its inception in 2002 he has also been the conductor of Orchestra 143, a classical chamber orchestra based in Turramurra. In 2013 he will conduct a performance with the Crendon Chamber Orchestra near Oxford in the UK.

In 2002 David co–wrote and conducted the soundtrack for the film *Compost Monster*, which has been screened in Sydney and in London. For Bourbaki's winter 2010 concerts 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.

Alastair Duff–Forbes, violin

Alastair began playing the violin at the age of five. He attended the Conservatorium High School and studied with Alice Waten and Goetz Richter. Since commencing tertiary studies in 2001 at the Sydney Conservatorium, Alastair has received a number of scholarships; he graduated in 2004 with a Bachelor of Music (Honours) majoring in violin, and studied for a Master of Music in violin performance under Chris Kimber and Carl Pini.

Alastair has participated in master classes with renowned artists including Vladimir Ashkenazy, Dene Olding, the Borodin Quartet and the Goldner String Quartet. Numerous solo recitals and concertos include the Barber violin concerto in 2004 with the Sydney Conservatorium Symphony, and the Mozart A major concerto in 2007 with Orchestra 143. He has been a member of the Australian Youth Orchestra, and has occupied the concertmaster's chair in the Sydney Conservatorium Symphony Orchestra, and in the Bourbaki Ensemble since 2007.

Michelle Urquhart, viola

Michelle started her studies on violin at the age of 8 with Gill Christie and age 11 with Alex Todicescu. She resumed studies on viola at age 16, continued on to the Sydney Conservatorium, and currently studies with Jeremy Williams. Michelle regularly performs with Orchestra 143, the Bourbaki Ensemble and the Central Coast Symphony Orchestra, and is principal violist with the Tasmanian Discovery Orchestra.

Earlier this year Michelle took lessons in the UK with well known pedagogues David Takeno and Pavlo Besnosiuk. She has performed solos with Orchestra 143 and the SBS Youth Orchestra. In her youth Michelle was overall winner of the Ku–Ring–Gai Philharmonic concerto competition, and also won, in partnership with Natalie Chee, the double concerto award.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

Formed in 2001, the Bourbaki Ensemble has spent twelve wonderful years performing the great masterpieces of the repertoire for string orchestra alongside exciting recent works by lesser known composers. Every one of the Ensemble's thirty–four programmes has included Australian compositions, some half dozen of them having been written especially for our concerts. We have performed the music of established composers Peter Sculthorpe, Nigel Butterley and Richard Meale as well as that of emerging composers Aaron Kenny, Alex Pozniak and Mark Oliveiro, among many others. Of overseas repertoire performed, highlights have included the *Adagio* from Mahler's tenth symphony, Vaughan Williams' *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*, Richard Strauss' *Metamorphosen* and Terry Riley's *In C*.

Violins Paul Pokorny, Emlyn Lewis–Jones, Dawid Botha, Derek Davies*, Stephanie Fulton, Greta Lee, Deborah McGowan, Kahne Rajaratnam, Amanda Tse, Richard Willgoss. [*viola in Bruckner]

Violas Kathryn Ramsay, Robyn Botha, Tara Hashembhoy, Kate Hughes, Michelle Urquhart.

Violoncellos Bronwen Whyatt, Michael Bowrey, Ian Macourt, Catherine Willis.

Bass Sasha Marker.

Further information 0433074322 or `www.bourbakiensemble.org`