THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

songs from south and north: music for voice and strings

Elgar Serenade for String Orchestra

Delius Late Swallows

Nielsen Bøhmisk–Dansk Folketone

Svendsen Two Swedish Folk Melodies

Bull Säterjentens Søndag

Dixon Songs of Transience

Lotte Latukefu, mezzo–soprano

David Angell, conductor

2.30 pm, Sunday 29 June 2014

St. Stephen's Church, Newtown

Today the Bourbaki Ensemble presents its thirteenth world premiere performance! Along with our many performances of works being given for the first time in Australia – very likely at least the same number, though it can be difficult to find details of any previous performances – we believe that this gives Bourbaki an unbeatable record among amateur ensembles in promoting exciting new music from Australia and overseas.

Wayne Dixon's *Songs of Transience* is a setting of five poems by Verlaine (in English translation) for voice, cor anglais and strings. We are delighted to welcome Lotte Latukefu for her first performance with Bourbaki. The cor anglais part will be taken by Rachel Tolmie, who has played with us in a number of concerts, as well as being the principal soloist on our first recording, *Mozart in Love*. The Bourbaki Ensemble has also recorded Wayne's string piece *Mermaids* for a CD under that title. Both of these discs will be available for purchase at interval.

Further "songs from the north" in our programme are provided by Johan Svendsen, in his harmonisation of Swedish folk melodies, and Carl Nielsen, in his use of Danish and Bohemian tunes. There is also an unintended ceremonial aspect to today's concert, in that the Danish song already mentioned tells the story of Denmark's Queen Dagmar (early thirteenth century), while one of the Swedish tunes turned out, unknown to us, to be nowadays the Swedish national anthem! We complete our performance with works by two of the greatest English composers of the early twentieth century, Elgar and Delius.

As always, we are very grateful to the parish staff and the congregation at St. Stephen's for allowing us to give concerts in the attractive acoustics and historically fascinating environment of one of Sydney's oldest churches. We thank you for attending and trust that you will enjoy the performance.

PROGRAMME

Carl Nielsen Bøhmisk–Dansk Folketone

Wayne Dixon Songs of Transience, Op. 29, for voice, cor anglais and divided strings

Lotte Latukefu, mezzo–soprano

INTERVAL
20 minutes

Ole Bull Säterjentens Søndag

Johan Svendsen Two Swedish Folk Melodies, Op. 27

I. Allt under himmelens fäste
II. Du gamla, du friska, du fjellhöga Nord

Sir Edward Elgar Serenade for String Orchestra, Op. 20

I. Allegro piacevole
II. Larghetto
III. Allegretto

Frederick Delius Late Swallows

The apparently incongruous juxtaposition of central European and Scandinavian melodies in the *Bøhmisk–Dansk Folketone* of **Carl Nielsen** (1865–1931) has, in fact, deep roots in Danish history. Margaret of Bohemia was born in about 1186, the daughter of King Přemysl I Ottokar of Bohemia, and in 1205 married the Danish king Valdemar Sejr. Taking as queen the Danish name Dagmar, she soon became beloved among the people on account of her concern for their liberty and welfare. Her all too short reign ended with her death in childbirth in 1212. The folksong *Dronning Dagmar ligger i Ribe syg* ("Queen Dagmar lies ill in Ribe") recounts how the king, on hearing of his queen's illness, rode furiously from Skanderborg to Ribe. On her deathbed, Dagmar begged Valdemar to free all prisoners and pardon all outlaws; and to marry, after her death, Kirsten of Ribe rather than the Portuguese princess Berengária: Valdemar granted her first petition, but denied her second. The town of Ribe today is the site of a monument to Queen Dagmar: the statue, depicting Margaret/Dagmar standing in the prow of the ship which brings her to Ribe for her marriage, is the work of Anne Marie Carl–Nielsen, the composer's wife.

The *Bøhmisk–Dansk Folketone*, dating from 1928, is scored for string orchestra with prominent roles for solo quartet. It opens with two verses of a gently flowing Bohemian folk song, separated by a short interlude which features, albeit on a small scale, Nielsen's favoured "progressive tonality". The "Dronning Dagmar" folk song soon appears on a solo violin and viola, and from this point onwards it dominates the whole work, though the Bohemian tune is still heard occasionally. The Danish song also alternates between "traditional" and "progressive" harmonies, highlights being its appearance as a chorale for string quartet alone, and its final majestic statements on cellos and bass.

Wayne Dixon was born in Sydney in 1945 and has studied under eminent musicians including John Antill and Edward Cowie (composition) and Sir Adrian Boult and Vernon Handley (conducting). He has occupied a wide variety of posts in the academic and community sectors of the Australian musical scene, particularly in the Illawarra region. His compositions range from major orchestral works to chamber music and songs.

The composer writes: I became besotted with the often whimsical, often reflective, often bitingly satirical poetry of the nineteenth century French writer Paul Verlaine some years back whilst seeking out appropriate French texts for an intended song cycle for today's soloist, my friend and colleague Lotte Latukefu. In 2010 I discovered Professor Norman Shapiro's superb

My Familiar Dream
Mon rêve familier

Often I dream this poignant fantasy;
Strange, of a woman never met, but who
Loves me, and whom I love, and who seems new
Each time and yet who never seems the same; and she

Loves me, and understands the mystery
Clouding my heart, as no one else can do;
And who, alone, with tears fresh as the dew,
Soothes, cools my pale and fevered brow for me.

Her hair? Red, blond, or brown? I don't know which.
Nor do I know her name. But lush and rich
It is, like those of friends once loved, exiled

By life. Her glance? A statue's glance. And for
Her voice, it sings – distant and mellow, mild –
The music of dear voices heard no more.

Mystical Evening Twilight
Crépuscule du soir mystique

Memory, with the Twilight's dusky light,
Reddening, trembles on the burning sky's
Hope–filled horizon: flames that, in their height,
Glimmering backward, forward seem to rise
Like some mysterious wall, where, trellis–wise,
Many a flower lies in the gathering night
– Buttercup, dahlia, tulip, lily white –
Spread, basking in their heavy–perfumed sighs,
Hot, torpid–breathed, whose poisons mesmerize
– Buttercup, dahlia, tulip, lily white –
And drown my mind, my soul, my ears, my eyes
In one consuming swoon, where, listless, lies
Memory, with the Twilight's dusky light.

The Shepherd's Hour
L'heure du berger

The rising moon shines reddish through the mist;
Amid the smoke–like, quivering haze, the field
Drops off to sleep; the frog croaks, squawks, concealed
Among the shivering reeds, green zephyr–kissed.

The water–flowers close up their petals, while
Fireflies go flitting over bush and briar;
Distant, dim poplar–ghosts stretch higher and higher
Their slender silhouettes in single file.

The hoot–owls, silent, wake and take their flight,
Plowing the black air with their weighty wings;
The heavens fill with soundless glitterings.
White, Venus sails forth, and it is night.

translations of Verlaine and became besotted once more, successfully seeking Dr Shapiro's leave (he is Professor of Romance Languages at the Wesleyan University in Massachusetts) to set some of those translations, rather than Verlaine's originals (somewhat to Lotte's chagrin!). I have chosen five of the reflective, introspective poems and spent some time considering which order of the settings would work best. Images of nostalgia, remembrance, the onset of night, of autumn, of resignation and acceptance permeate the work, so I chose the title *Songs of Transience* after much tossing about of alternatives. The instrumental interlude between the fourth and fifth songs was originally called simply *Interlude*, but whilst wondering what notes to write in this interlude I heard the news of the Christchurch earthquake; thus the *Threnody for Christchurch* which, as a title, may sit uneasily within a work springing out of French poetry, but is surely not inconsistent with the notion of transience.

Autumn song
Chanson d'automne

The autumn's throbbing
Strings moan, sobbing,
Drone their dole;
Long–drawn and low,
Each tremolo
Sears my soul. . .

When tolls the hour
I think of our
Days gone by;
Pallid as death
I gasp for breath
And I cry.

And like a dead
Leaf, buffeted,
Tempest–tossed,
I ride the air –
Now here, now there –
Aimless, lost. . .

Circumspection
Circonspection

Give me your hand, hold still your breath, let's sit
Beneath this great tree, where the dusk–gray air
Wafts sighing, dying in the boughs, and where
The pale leaves softly stir, caressed, moonlit.

Motionless, let us bow our heads and quit
All thought. Let's dream our dream, let's leave to their
Devices, joy and love – windswept – like hair
Breeze–blown, brushed by the owl's wing grazing it.

Let us not even hope. In quiet peace
Let our two souls mirror the days' surcease
And the sun's death in night, tranquil and deep.

In silence let us rest, calm, resolute;
It is not right to trouble, in his sleep,
Nature, that fearsome god, ferocious, mute.

I am most grateful to Dr Shapiro for the access generously granted to his texts and to Lotte Latukefu for the intense work she has done over many weeks in preparation for today's premiere performance.

Although his fame has now somewhat dimmed, the great Norwegian violinist **Ole Bull** (1810–1880) was in his day considered to be on a level with Paganini. He performed recital programmes with Franz Liszt at the piano, his playing was much admired by Schumann, and his family had marriage connections with that of Grieg. Born in Bergen, Bull performed in public at an early age before moving to Christiania (now Oslo) for further study. He soon embarked upon a fully professional solo career, travelling around Europe, England and later America. He achieved the remarkable feat of actually making a good living from performance, so much so that he was able to acquire a collection of violins and violas including instruments by Amati, Gasparo da Salò, Guarneri del Gesù and Stradivari. Bull himself also studied violin–making and became a skilled luthier.

As a composer, Bull produced a substantial amount of music, much of which, not surprisingly, features the violin in a solo role. There are at least five violin concertos, as well as the *Hommage à Moscou* for violin, chorus and orchestra. Of his music, little is performed today except for a handful of pieces such as *Säterjentens Søndag* ("The Herdgirl's Sunday"), best known in a version for string orchestra by **Johan Svendsen** (1840–1911). Three simple and touching phrases, supported by poignant harmonies, comprise a brief but memorable composition.

The Norwegian–born Svendsen studied in Leipzig and Paris before settling in Copenhagen in 1883 as principal conductor of the Royal Theatre Orchestra. His works include symphonies, concertos and four *Norwegian Rhapsodies*. His Op. 27 comprises settings for strings of two Swedish folk songs. The first, *Allt under himmelens fäste* ("Beneath the heavenly firmament") is a ballad of doomed love. It has been recorded by such great singers as Jussi Björling; and its continuing popularity in Sweden is attested by settings in contemporary style on YouTube.

Although the melody of *Du gamla, du friska, du fjellhöga Nord* ("Thou ancient, thou bracing, thou mountainous North") derives from folk sources, the text does not: it was written by the poet and antiquarian Richard Dybeck in 1844. It is a hymn of praise to the Swedish land, and since the early 20th century (with the word *friska* altered to *fria*, "free") has been adopted popularly, though never officially, as Sweden's national anthem.

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 member 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 wondrous 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.

Those who love the music of **Frederick Delius** (1862–1934) owe an immense debt to Eric Fenby, who took down many scores from Delius' dictation when the composer was too ill to write them himself. In 1962, Fenby arranged for string orchestra the evocative slow movement *Late Swallows* from Delius' string quartet, describing it as "a beautiful autumnal soliloquy in sound conjured up from thoughts of the swallows darting to and fro from the eaves of the studios" after Delius had been forced by war to flee his home at Grez–sur–Loing near Paris.

David Angell, conductor

David has been playing viola for many years with some of the best known non–professional orchestras in Australia. As a violist and chorister he has performed under internationally famous conductors including Sir Charles Mackerras, Stuart Challender and John Hopkins.

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. Earlier this year, David was the conductor for the Orchestra 143 Mozartathon, which presented thirty–nine Mozart symphonies in the course of five concerts spread over a single weekend.

Lotte Latukefu, mezzo–soprano

Lotte Latukefu is a lecturer in the Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts at the University of Wollongong. She is a mezzo–soprano and has a particular interest in contemporary Australian art song. In the last seven years Lotte has premiered, nationally and internationally, a range of new Australian compositions, many of which engage inter–culturally with Asian and Pacific cultures in order to investigate Asian–Pacific identity within art music and in particular, contemporary art song. In January 2015 Lotte will direct the HONK! Oz street music festival in Wollongong, a festival that blurs the line between artist and audience, between professional and amateur. Lotte has recently been awarded a visiting fellow position at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, which she hopes to take up in 2015.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

Formed in 2001, the Bourbaki Ensemble is a string orchestra based at St. Stephen's Church, Newtown. The Ensemble performs exciting recent music alongside the masterpieces of the string repertoire, and is strongly committed to programming works by Australian composers.

General Charles Denis Sauter Bourbaki (1816–1897) was a figure of some importance in the Franco–Prussian war. In 1862 he was offered, but declined, the throne of Greece. Owing to the swings and roundabouts of French military politics he was at various times forced to flee his homeland, and was at one time interned in Switzerland, an event documented at the Bourbaki Panorama in Lucerne. On the centenary of his death, a top secret meeting at Prague proposed to name Bourbaki as patron of the European Union. However, the representatives of certain nations successfully blackened Bourbaki's name with baseless allegations of his involvement with an international espionage ring headed by a shadowy figure using the alias Irene Adler. It is rumoured that the whole affair has been documented in a confidential report under the title *A Scandal in Bohemia*.

Violins Emlyn Lewis–Jones, Derek Davies, Kathryn Crossing, Camille Hanrahan–Tan, Madeleina Hanrahan–Tan, Paul Hoskinson, Deborah McGowan, Richard Willgoss, Tanja Zech.

Violas Kathryn Ramsay, Tara Hashambhoy, Adrian McDonald.

Violoncellos John Napier, Ian Macourt, Nicole McVicar, Catherine Willis.

Bass Mark Szeto.

Cor Anglais Rachel Tolmie.