THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

lines at infinity: music for strings

Vaughan Williams Oboe Concerto

Sibelius Impromptu for String Orchestra

Finzi Romance

George Dyson Concerto da Chiesa

Edward Primrose Entre les Lignes

Chris Williams Lines at Infinity

Niamh Dell, oboe
David Angell, conductor

2.30 pm, Sunday 4 December 2016

St. Stephen's Church, Newtown

Welcome to the final Bourbaki concert for 2016! We are thrilled and delighted to be giving the premiere performance of our commissioned work *Lines at infinity* by Australian composer Chris Williams. Our first encounter with Chris's music was in July 2010, when we performed his beautifully crafted and expressive *Altjiranga mitjina*. At that time, Chris was a recent graduate of the Sydney Conservatorium; since then he has studied at Oxford University, has participated in Sir Peter Maxwell Davies' advanced composition course at the Dartington International Summer School, England, and has worked with many leading composers. His music has been performed not only in Australia (where, among many other engagements, he provided the score for this year's STC production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), but also in the UK and in the USA, where a piece was commissioned by Carnegie Hall. Chris is clearly earning himself a fine reputation around the world, and is a composer to look (and listen) out for in the future!

Today's programme also includes three compositions from the great English tradition of string music. There is an exquisite miniature from the pen of Gerald Finzi; a substantial piece for string quartet and orchestra by George Dyson, based in part on well–known hymn tunes; and Ralph Vaughan Williams' wonderful oboe concerto, performed by outstanding young oboist Niamh Dell. The mournful tone of Edward Primrose's *Entre les lignes* serves to commemorate the victims of the *Charlie Hebdo* attack in Paris early last year.

Planning for next year's Bourbaki Ensemble concerts is far from complete, but we can say for certain that we will be hosting two wonderful soloists in Lisa Cooper, soprano, and Rachel Tolmie, cor anglais. For what we know at this stage, please see the programme back cover. We thank all our audiences for their support this year, and hope to see you again in 2017.

PROGRAMME

Jean Sibelius Impromptu for String Orchestra

Edward Primrose Entre les Lignes

Ralph Vaughan Williams Concerto for Oboe and Strings

I Rondo pastorale
II Minuet & Musette
III Finale (scherzo)

Niamh Dell, oboe

INTERVAL
20 minutes

Gerald Finzi Romance, Op. 11, for string orchestra

Chris Williams Lines at Infinity

George Dyson Concerto da Chiesa

I Veni, Emmanuel
II Corde natus
III Laetatus sum

Emlyn Lewis–Jones, Paul Pokorny, violins
Kathryn Ramsay, viola
Danny Morris, violoncello

In 1888, **Jean Sibelius** (1865–1957) composed incidental music for the melodrama *Svartsjukans nätter* ("Nights of Jealousy") by Johan Ludvig Runeberg. In 1893, he wrote the *Six Impromptus* for piano, Op. 5, basing Nos. 5 and 6 on the music from the aforesaid play. In 1894, he further arranged these two pieces to form this afternoon's *Impromptu*. While retaining the noble and elegiac lines of the melody and the generally soft dynamic, he rewrote the *vivace* of the fifth impromptu as an *andantino* and replaced the sparkling accompanying arpeggios with long notes. The gentle waltz feel of the sixth impromptu, first in E major and then E minor, is hardly changed from the piano version and forms the central section of today's work.

Crendon Chamber Orchestra, UK.

Australian composer **Edward Primrose** has written numerous items of orchestral, choral and electronic music. He has been closely involved with writing music for theatre and film, and has held various positions at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School. Edward describes his recent composition *Entre les lignes* in the following words.

In January 2015, I was in Paris to compose a work for the saxophonist Daniel Kientzy. For contrabass saxophone and six trombones, it became known as *Lignes de faille* ("Fault lines"). The title became a reflection of my stay, for I happened to be travelling in the metro directly underneath as the atrocity was taking place at the headquarters of *Charlie Hebdo*.

The new work *Entre les lignes* ("Between the lines") was composed once back in the relative safety of Sydney but there is a remnance of the despair that one feels when faced with such an unimaginable act of misanthropy. The work is quiet and sombre, with a two–note motif permeating a series of irregular chord groupings. The only light comes with a final sustained high violin melody which might be searching for solace.

Programme note courtesy of the composer.

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958) came from a family confessing progressive social views: he numbered among his relations Charles Darwin and the potter (and anti–slavery campaigner) Josiah Wedgwood. One may speculate that such a background encouraged him to value the collective endeavour of symphonic and choral performance more highly than the individuality of the concerto. Indeed, of his three greatest solo works, only one actually bears the title of “concerto”.

The *Oboe Concerto* was written in 1943–44 for the great English oboist Leon Goossens. Its first movement is entitled *Rondo pastorale*, and certainly it is possible to identify various themes which fall into a classical *rondo* pattern. The overall feeling, however, is rather that of a gloriously rhapsodic extemporisation which passes freely back and forth between the soloist and orchestra. The last third of the movement consists, in effect, of a lengthy accompanied cadenza for the oboe, very free in tempo, with occasional orchestral interpolations. It is followed, nominally, by an alternation of minuet, a stately dance obligatory in eighteenth century society, and musette, a country dance based upon a bagpipe drone – though Vaughan Williams' distinctly idiosyncratic interpretation of the terms offers the barest hint of the pipes, and none at all of the ballroom, in this brief and vivacious movement. The *Scherzo* finale begins with severe tests of dexterity from both the soloist and the orchestra in a succession of sparkling episodes. As the movement proceeds it incorporates softer and more lyrical interpolations in a much slower tempo; twice the faster music returns; but the third slow section brings the work to a quiet close.

Anyone interested in the relative influence of heredity and environment on the development of an artist could do worse than ponder the case of **Gerald Finzi** (1901–1956). Born in London to an Italian father and a German mother, Finzi eventually became a composer whose characteristic “Englishness” is evident in every piece he wrote. Finzi had a deep devotion to widely varied aspects of the English cultural heritage. He collected an extensive library of English literature and composed many fine settings of English poetry; he unearthed, edited and published works by obscure eighteenth–century English composers; he cultivated apple trees, saving many rare varieties from extinction.

Finzi was indirectly but deeply affected by the First World War, his esteemed composition teacher Ernest Farrar having died on the Western Front. Before he reached maturity Finzi had also lost his father and three brothers; it is therefore not surprising that his music is often suffused with a gently elegiac spirit, passing through patient grief to a timeless wisdom. As a composer Finzi was largely a miniaturist; prominent among his compositions are dozens of settings of Thomas Hardy, whose poems frequently combine a melancholy which must have been congenial to Finzi with a darker streak of pessimism which found less response from the composer. He wrote numerous works for strings or small orchestra, many of these also with voice – read more about one of them on the programme back cover!

Finzi’s *Romance* for strings was composed in 1928 but not performed until 1951, when it was given by the Reading String Players under conductor John Russell, to whom the work is dedicated. Finzi’s characteristic traits of exquisitely wrought melody and poignant harmony are very much to the fore, and his love of false relation (a "chromatic contradiction" with notes such as B♮ and B♭ occurring simultaneously or in close proximity) is often evident.

The concentrated, intensely still opening of the *Romance* begins bit by bit to move more freely, suggesting a landscape shrouded in gradually clearing mists. After a *ritardando* which almost brings the piece to a standstill, the principal section of the work begins with a resumption of the initial tempo and a violin theme reminiscent, no doubt unintentionally, of Elgar's violin concerto. Many small variations of tempo continue to enhance the expressive impact of the music. A faster middle section is introduced by a solo violin, and builds to a rhythmic climax before relaxing into a restatement of the "Elgar" theme. The music becomes ever more introspective, ending with a few bars marked *doppio più lento*: twice as slow as the beginning. One feels that the final hushed chords need never finish.

Lines at Infinity continues an obsession I have with basic musical shapes – gestures – and an endless fascination with the expressive possibilities of single lines, be they musical, visual, or mathematical. The "line at infinity" is the line of points at which parallel lines meet, an apparent paradox that can nonetheless be easily understood intuitively. A vanishing point on the horizon of an image can be thought of as a point "at infinity", the horizon is a line of such points at which, for example, train tracks appear to converge, though they remain in parallel. It is a beautiful perceptual paradox.

Lines at Infinity grows out of two melodic lines, first heard in the violins. They are actually the same line, though at different speeds and alignments, and they repeatedly converge despite being “in parallel”. Similarly, the piece, in two distinct halves, also converges. Just as the second musical idea establishes itself, we hear it transformed, revealing its relationship to the same, simple, descending line which has absorbed the entire first half of the piece. This simple descending line finally turns into a restless, relentlessly ascending line, before seeming to disappear, converging “at infinity”.

Chris Williams, a graduate of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, completed a Master of Philosophy in composition with Robert Saxton at the University of Oxford in 2013. In 2012 Chris was commissioned by Carnegie Hall, where his work *San–Shih–Fan* was premiered. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* recently called Chris Williams’ music “a lovely shade of wistful”, while the *Daily Review* has noted his “brilliantly unsettling music” for Sydney Theatre Company’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* at the Sydney Opera House.

Programme note courtesy of the composer.

In 1948 and 1949, British composer George Dyson wrote a pair of works for strings, *Concerto da Camera* and *Concerto da Chiesa*. The latter is scored for a solo string quartet alongside the string orchestra, and in the composer’s own words is “founded on old hymn–melodies so woven in, I hope, that it is not easy to be sure which are old and which are new.” The first movement is based upon the Advent hymn *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*, though only the first two lines are heard (initially in a solo cello) before the music begins to adopt a much darker and more intense tone. As the movement progresses, the almost constant disjunction between the theme and its accompanying harmonies creates a mood of anguish which, possibly, expresses the composer’s reaction to the still recent Second World War.

Corde natus ("Of the Father's love begotten") is a complete contrast. The flowing melody is given first to a solo viola, and appears throughout the movement in alternation with joyful faster, dance–like episodes. The finale, *Laetatus sum* ("I was glad"), is built upon seventeenth century psalm tunes. It opens with a vigorously syncopated theme alternating between the orchestra and the solo quartet, and after various contrasting sections reaches a climax with the refrain "Rejoice! Rejoice!" which, although belonging to "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel", could find no place in the sombre first movement.

George Dyson was born in 1883 into a Yorkshire working–class family. His parents had a keen interest in music and encouraged the same in their son, so much so that by the age of 21 he had won both a scholarship to the Royal College of Music, London, and the Mendelssohn Scholarship, which enabled him to spend some years of study in Italy. A number of compositions, mostly chamber and vocal music, but also including orchestral pieces and an unfinished opera, date from the next decade; these, however, are known only from secondary references, as Dyson in later life destroyed most of his manuscripts from this period. In 1914 he enlisted in the Royal Fusiliers, and saw action in the trenches until being invalided home in 1916. After the war Dyson entered upon what was to be his life's work as a teacher and administrator of music at Winchester College and the RCM. Alongside these activities he found time to compose; many of his works, notably *The Canterbury Pilgrims* (after Chaucer), belong to the great English choral–orchestral tradition, though he also produced a symphony and a violin concerto, each of which remains in the recorded repertoire. Dyson was knighted in 1941, and died in 1964; his music remains an attractive example of the more conservative tendency in British twentieth century composition.

Niamh Dell, oboe

Niamh Dell is an oboist from Perth who completed her undergraduate degree at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, studying under Alexandre Oguey and Ngaire de Korte. Niamh has participated in programs run by the Australian Youth Orchestra and the Australian International Symphony Orchestra Institute, and has recently attended the Darmstadt International Summer School for New Music, where she took lessons with renowned contemporary oboist Peter Veale. In 2016 Niamh completed her honours at the University of Western Australia, studying with Liz Chee while conducting research into contemporary Italian composer Franco Donatoni.

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 Richard Bonynge. David took up conducting in 1998 with a highly successful season of *West Side Story* for Holroyd Musical Society. In February 2001 he assembled the Bourbaki Ensemble and conducted its inaugural performance, featuring works by Sculthorpe, Debussy, Mahler and Dvořák. The Ensemble has subsequently attracted note for its imaginative programming and its support of Australian composers. In March 2014, David directed the Orchestra 143 Mozartathon, conducting 39 Mozart symphonies in the course of five concerts spread over a single weekend. He has guest conducted the Crendon Chamber Orchestra (UK) in a programme of Mozart, Mahler and Australian composers, and will return to conduct them again in 2017. In 2016 David gave concerts with the Woollahra Philharmonic Orchestra and the Eastern Sydney Chamber Orchestra.

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 performing music of the twentieth and twenty first centuries, and includes in every programme at least one Australian composition.

As well as being a figure of importance in nineteenth century French military circles, General Charles Denis Sauter Bourbaki (1816–1897) had wide–ranging interests in both the arts and the sciences. It is said that the sight of columns of soldiers appearing to converge as they marched into the distance inspired him with the concept of a new theory of space, to which he gave the name *géométrie projective*. Sadly, no record of Bourbaki's thoughts survives. It appears that while he submitted a detailed exposition of his ideas to his superiors, the document was referred to the Army's *bureau euclidienne*, which dismissed it as frivolous "academic" speculation of no conceivable military value, and promptly recycled it.

Violins Emlyn Lewis–Jones, Paul Pokorny,
Harriet Cunningham, Camille Hanrahan–Tan,
Madeleina Hanrahan–Tan, Amanda Hoh,
Ie–Wen Kwee, Deborah McGowan,
Rob Newnham, Richard Willgoss.

Violas Kathryn Ramsay, Marilyn McLeod,
Monique Mezzatesta, Carl St. Jacques.

Violoncellos Danny Morris, Michael Bowrey,
Margaret Lazanas, Nicole McVicar,
Catherine Willis.

Basses Sasha Cotis, Daniel Murphy.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

forthcoming programmes

We expect to give two Bourbaki Ensemble concerts in 2017, one in March and one in May or June (after which David will be in the UK, conducting the Crendon Chamber Orchestra). While details are yet to be finalised, we are able to announce that we will be joined by two very fine soloists.

Our first concert will feature soprano Lisa Cooper from Opera Australia. We are extremely fortunate to have Lisa singing the marvellous *Dies Natalis* by Gerald Finzi, which sets words by Thomas Traherne (*ca.* 1638–1674) conveying a picture of the world through the perceptions of a newborn child.

In May/June we welcome back a long–time friend and musical collaborator in Rachel Tolmie. An exceedingly fine performer on both oboe and cor anglais, in this concert Rachel will play exclusively the latter in the *Sicilienne* by Australian composer Richard Percival and the *Concertante* (1950) of Peter Racine Fricker. This will be Rachel's fifth solo concert performance with Bourbaki, not counting the CD *Mozart in Love*.

Exact dates for these performances are yet to be settled, as are the remainder of the programmes – though, as always, Australian compositions will be featured, and, as usual, there will be music you (probably) haven't heard before – so if you are not yet on our mailing list, please leave your name and email address at the door or send details to `david@bourbakiensemble.org`. These are concerts you will not want to miss!

Further information 0433074322 or `www.bourbakiensemble.org`

Programme details subject to change