THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

a child's world: music for strings

Finzi Dies Natalis

Debussy Children's Corner

Sculthorpe Shining Island

Gershwin Lullaby

Shalygin Lullaby

Lisa Cooper, soprano
David Angell, conductor

2.45 pm, Sunday 12 March 2017

St. Stephen's Church, Newtown

Welcome to the first Bourbaki concert for 2017! Our theme of "a child's world" encompasses music by Gerald Finzi in which the world is described from the point of view of a newborn child, and two lullabies – though if a lullaby is intended to send a child to sleep, one of those we offer today would be most unlikely to succeed. There is also music written, essentially, for the entertainment of children – or, in fact, of one specific child, Claude Debussy's young daughter Chouchou. The *Children's Corner* suite is presented in a sparkling new arrangement for strings. We also perform Peter Sculthorpe's wonderful *Shining Island*, written in memory of the Polish composer Henryk Górecki. Górecki is best known for his *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs*, but also wrote music for string orchestra, including *Three pieces in olden style*, performed by Bourbaki in 2011.

As always, our programme includes music you (probably) haven't heard before. Though, strictly speaking, there are no first performances in today's concert, the Shalygin *Lullaby* has, to the best of our knowledge, never been performed before in Australia; and the Sculthorpe only once, in 2011. (It is extraordinary that such a fine Australian work should have to wait six years for its second Australian performance.) And though the Debussy suite *Children's Corner* has been given many times in its original version for piano, today will be the premiere of David Angell's string arrangement.

If you happen to be in the UK later this year, put Saturday 28 October in your diary! David will be directing the Crendon Chamber Orchestra in a concert at Thame, an old market town not far from Oxford. The programme is yet to be decided, but last time David conducted the CCO, works performed included three by Australian composers and the spectacular string arrangement of the *Adagio* from Mahler's tenth symphony. So you can count on something exciting! Hope to see you there.

PROGRAMME

Maxim Shalygin Lullaby for string orchestra

Gerald Finzi Dies Natalis: cantata for soprano and strings, Op. 8

- I Intrada
- II Rhapsody (*recitativo stromentato*)
- III The Rapture (*danza*)
- IV Wonder (*arioso*)
- V The Salutation (*aria*)

Lisa Cooper, soprano

INTERVAL

20 minutes

Peter Sculthorpe Shining Island, for strings

Claude Debussy Children's Corner, suite for piano
Arranged for strings by David Angell

- I Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum
- II Jimbo's Lullaby
- III Serenade of the Doll
- IV The snow is dancing
- V The little Shepherd
- VI Golliwogg's cake walk

George Gershwin Lullaby for String Orchestra

Maxim Shalygin was born in the Ukraine in 1985. He studied at the St. Petersburg Conservatorium, in Kiev and at the Royal Conservatory of The Hague, and now lives and works in the Netherlands. Many of his compositions explore the musical potentialities of single instruments: an example is his *Letters to Anna*, a 25–minute work described as a "symphony for violin solo". Other major interests include electronic music and ballet.

Dating from 2008, Shalygin's *Lullaby* for string orchestra is related to the composer's fascination with individual lines, in that each of its seventeen parts is allocated to a single performer. Starting with the principal viola, every performer plays exactly the same D♭ major theme, repeating it up to ten times. No attempt is made to synchronise the theme in different parts, the result of this being that after a few entries the piece begins to give the impression of a more or less static superimposition of all notes of the scale, though the by now familiar phrases of the melody remain clearly discernible within. The piece gradually increases in dynamic, ending with a marking of *ffff*: that is, not just loud but very, very, very loud. Although this might seem to defeat the purpose of a lullaby, it surely makes for an impressive conclusion!

The poetic works of Thomas Traherne (*ca.* 1636–1674) remained unpublished in his lifetime and were lost for 200 years after his death. Their fortuitous discovery and publication in the early twentieth century influenced numerous writers and musicians, among them **Gerald Finzi** (1901–1956), whose *Dies Natalis* sets a prose text from Traherne's *Centuries of Meditation* and three of his poems.

Traherne's writings are often described as "metaphysical" or "mystical"; among his most important poetic concerns are

Rhapsody

Will you see the infancy of this sublime and celestial greatness? I was a stranger, which at my entrance into the world was saluted and surrounded with innumerable joys; my knowledge was Divine. I was entertain'd like an Angel with the works of God in their splendour and glory. Heaven and Earth did sing my Creator's praises, and could not make more melody to Adam than to me. Certainly Adam in Paradise had not more sweet and curious apprehensions of the world than I. All appear'd new, and strange at first, inexpressibly rare and delightful and beautiful. All things were spotless and pure and glorious.

The corn was orient and immortal wheat, which never should be reap'd nor was ever sown. I thought it had stood from everlasting to everlasting. The green trees, when I saw them first, transported and ravish'd me, their sweetness and unusual beauty made my heart to leap, and almost mad with ecstasy, they were such strange and wonderful things.

O what venerable creatures did the aged seem! Immortal cherubims! And the young men glittering and sparkling Angels, and maids strange seraphic pieces of life and beauty! I knew not that they were born or should die; but all things abided eternally. I knew not that there were sins or complaints or laws. I dream'd not of poverties, contentions or vices. All tears and quarrels were hidden from mine eyes. I saw all in the peace of Eden. Everything was at rest, free and immortal.

the wisdom–in–innocence of childhood, and the "splendour and glory" of God as reflected in and revealed by the natural world. In these respects, his work prefigures that of such varied poets as William Blake and Gerard Manley Hopkins.

Dies Natalis consists of an instrumental *Intrada* and four vocal movements. Excepting the joyous outburst of praise in the third movement, the mood is generally serene and contemplative,

The Rapture

Sweet Infancy!
O Heavenly Fire! O Sacred Light!
How fair and bright!
How Great am I
Whom the whole world doth magnify!

O heavenly Joy!
O Great and Sacred Blessedness
Which I possess!
So great a Joy
Who did into my arms convey?

From God above
Being sent, the Gift doth me inflame,
To praise his name;
The Stars do move,
The Sun doth shine, to show his Love.

O how Divine
Am I! To all this Sacred Wealth,
This Life and Health,
Who rais'd? Who mine
Did make the same? What hand divine?

the voice of the child filled with a sense of wonder at the beauty of the world and its inhabitants. The atmosphere is movingly conveyed by the prevailing unhurried and flexible rhythms and poignant harmonies.

The *Intrada* is succeeded after a momentary pause by the *Rhapsody*, the voice joining the ensemble with an echo of the theme from the beginning of the work. The

Wonder

How like an Angel came I down!
How bright are all things here!
When first among his Works I did appear
O how their Glory did me crown!
The World resembled his Eternity,
In which my Soul did walk;
And ev'rything that I did see
Did with me talk.

The Skies in their Magnificence,
The lovely lively air,
Oh, how divine, how soft, how sweet, how fair!
The Stars did entertain my Sense;
And all the Works of God, so bright and pure,
So rich and great, did seem,
As if they ever must endure
In my esteem.

A Native Health and Innocence
Within my Bones did grow,
And while my God did all his Glories show
I felt a vigour in my Sense
That was all Spirit: I within did flow
With Seas of Life like Wine;
I nothing in the World did know
But 'twas Divine.

The Salutation

These little Limbs, these Eyes and Hands which here I find,
This panting Heart wherewith my Life begins;
Where have ye been? Behind what Curtain were ye from me hid so long?
Where was, in what Abyss, my new–made tongue?

When silent I so many thousand thousand Years
Beneath the Dust did in a Chaos lie,
How could I Smiles, or Tears, or Lips, or Hands, or Eyes, or Ears perceive?
Welcome, ye Treasures which I now receive.

From Dust I rise and out of Nothing now awake;
These brighter Regions which salute mine Eyes
A Gift from God I take: the Earth, the Seas, the Light, the lofty Skies,
The Sun and Stars are mine, if these I prize.

A Stranger here Strange things doth meet, strange Glory see,
Strange Treasures lodg'd in this fair World appear
Strange all and New to me: But that they mine should be who Nothing was,
That Strangest is of all; yet brought to pass.

exhilaration of *The Rapture* and the gracefully shaped vocal lines of *Wonder* lead into the final movement. *The Salutation* consists of a virtually constant line of melody in the orchestra, the voice floating above it in an ecstatic *cantilena*. The infinitely quiet, peaceful conclusion is entrusted to violas over a *pizzicato* accompaniment in cello and bass.

Shining Island is a work for string orchestra written in 2011 by **Peter Sculthorpe** (1929–2014) in memory of the celebrated Polish composer Henryk Górecki, who had died the previous November. Sculthorpe describes the origins of the work thus:

> I was greatly saddened when I learned that Henryk Górecki had died. He and I became good friends in 1994, at the Vale of Glamorgan Festival in Wales. . . Henryk was always full of *bonhomie*. Underlying it, however, was a brooding melancholy. . . As I came to know him better, he'd sometimes mutter, 'After bad there is worse.' I'd say, 'Come on, Henryk: after bad there's better.' 'No,' he'd reply, 'after bad there is always worse.' One day, he ventured,
>
> > *"Perhaps for you, coming from that big shining island, in the south, after bad there is better. For me, for many of us here, after bad there is only worse."*
>
> *Shining Island* is concerned with the emotions contained in the above conversation.

After a brief introduction for bass, the work continues with a lengthy and sombre theme for cellos: its generally downward–turning phrases represent Górecki's voice. The melody is taken over by violas, its intervals expanded to allow a more expressive air. With the entry of the violins (over fluent but harmonically static triplets in the violas), the theme develops into another variant: while the descending phrases are still very much in evidence, they begin to be interspersed with rising motives. An episode marked *poco drammatico* eases into a brief section of high–pitched birdsong imitation, violins and violas improvising their own parts independently of each other. Towards the end of *Shining Island*, Sculthorpe marks the score *con la massima espressione*: while the music is recognisably akin to that of the opening, it is now substantially upward–turning, optimistic and passionate. After another brief "birdsong" episode the piece concludes with lengthy sustained notes vanishing into silence.

The piano suite *Children's Corner* was written by **Claude Debussy** (1862–1918) for his adored daughter Emma–Claude, fondly known as Chouchou. The first movement, *Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum*, evokes the finger exercises beloved (or perhaps not) of young pianists – maybe Chouchou was obliged to finish her practice before being allowed to listen to the rest of "her" suite. *Jimbo's Lullaby* begins with a slightly clumsy (*doux et un peu gauche*) melody low in the left hand of the piano, which in a string arrangement simply begs to be given to a solo double bass. The *Serenade of the Doll* is a delicate waltz–like movement which was the first of the six to be written, being originally a contribution to a piano album for children compiled by a colleague of Debussy's. Marked *doux et estompé* (sweet and muffled), *The snow is dancing* has been described by Debussy scholar and pianist Roy Howat as "a pure Japanese print in music"; the string arrangement employs *flautando* bowing to create a light, flute–like tone, as well as shimmering semiquavers, *pizzicato* and harmonics. *The little Shepherd* alternates a solo violin with *tutti* passages; twice during the movement the music slows down to a standstill, perhaps suggesting the shepherd dozing off in the shade on a summer's day.

Children's Corner concludes with the witty and well–loved *Golliwogg's cake walk*. Beginning as a rhythmic and syncopated ragtime dance tune, the movement suddenly and unexpectedly sideslips into Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. The opera's famous opening cello theme – here given Debussy's tongue–in–cheek annotation *avec une grande émotion* – is answered repeatedly by snickering violas and violins. Before long a solo cello, evidently bored with Wagnerian pomposity, hints at a return to the cake walk. After a second prompt, the first violins consider the proposal; hesitate on the brink of resuming the Wagner; and decide with a shrug of the shoulders in favour of the cake walk.

George Gershwin (1898–1937) might be described as simultaneously the most seriously talented among American popular composers, and the most popular among talented American "serious" composers. He had the genius both to write in the accepted idiom of what was to become known as the "American songbook", and to improve its content, adding either emotional depth or fluent wit – or both – as occasion demanded. His ambition to be accepted as a composer for the concert hall and the opera house was fulfilled, without in any way sacrificing his natural gifts, in works such as the *Rhapsody in Blue*, the *Concerto in F* for piano and the "folk opera" *Porgy and Bess*.

Originally written for string quartet, Gershwin's *Lullaby* is frequently performed by full string orchestra: the arrangement we present today is by Jeff Manookian. The piece is based on a gently syncopated rising and falling phrase given to first violins, second violins and violas in three–part close harmony which often features flattened "blues" notes. A contrasting middle section is introduced by brief solos; the principal theme resumes in its fullest scoring yet, but soon diminishes in tone, allowing the *Lullaby* to conclude in near–silence. We thank you for attending our concert, and wish you good night.

Lisa Cooper, soprano

Lisa has a long and varied career in music performance and education. As a performer, Lisa has been at Opera Australia for 20 years, and has sung in the full time chorus as well as roles including Kate Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly*, Sylviane in *The Merry Widow* and Rosina in *The Barber Of Seville* (for OzOpera Schools Company). Lisa was a soloist for Willoughby Symphony Orchestra, The Sydney Opera House Orchestra and The Sydney Opera House Trust where she performed the Lead Boy roles in the Christmas At The Opera House pantomimes *Cinderella*, *Puss In Boots* and *Aladdin*. Prior to joining Opera Australia, Lisa was a secondary classroom music teacher with a strong involvement in co–curricular activities including directing school musicals, choirs and smaller vocal ensembles. She has also conducted church choirs, community choir and taught private singing at the Penrith Conservatorium of Music. Currently, Lisa is a vocal tutor at Knox Grammar School, Pymble Ladies College, The Kings School and NIDA. Lisa studied at Sydney University and has a Bachelor of Arts, with Honours in Music, and a Diploma in Education.

David Angell, conductor

As a violist and chorister, David has performed under internationally famous conductors including Sir Charles Mackerras, Stuart Challender and Richard Bonynge. Since taking up conducting in 1998, he has directed a number of musical societies and orchestras, most frequently the Bourbaki Ensemble and Orchestra 143. Later this year he will be guest conductor for the Woollahra Philharmonic Orchestra in their children's concert "The Naughty Corner", and for the Crendon Chamber Orchestra (UK), whom he first conducted in 2013 in a programme of Mahler, Mozart, Sculthorpe, Palmer and Kats–Chernin.

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.

Charles Denis Sauter Bourbaki (1816–1897) was a prominent figure in nineteenth century French military circles. A recent exciting discovery among the holdings of the *Bibliothèque Nationale* in Paris is of the catalogue from an exhibition of portraiture held in about 1870 at the *Galerie Cobaye*. A work by the painter, poet and actor Jean Grandterre is reproduced under the title "Officer eating a baguette in the Bois". Modern image–recognition technology, however, has succeeded in identifying the "baguette" as actually a souvlaki, suggesting that the subject is none other than General Bourbaki (who was of Greek ancestry, and was known to frequent the Bois de Boulogne). Sadly, the *galerie* was destroyed by fire shortly afterwards, and the original portrait must be presumed lost.

Violins Emlyn Lewis–Jones, Paul Pokorny, Dawid Botha, Joanna Buggy, Ian Colley, Camille Hanrahan–Tan, Madeleina Hanrahan–Tan, Ie–Wen Kwee, Rob Newnham, Warwick Pulley, Richard Willgoss, Victor Wu.

Violas Kathryn Ramsay, Robyn Botha, Marilyn McLeod, Danny Morris, Carl St. Jacques.

Violoncellos John Napier, Nicole McVicar, Shelayne Torta, Catherine Willis.

Bass Sasha Cotis.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

masterworks for strings

Vaughan Williams Tallis Fantasia
Bartók Divertimento
Sibelius Romance
Peter Racine Fricker Concertante
Richard Percival Sicilienne
Kim d'Espiney Con fuoco

Rachel Tolmie, cor anglais
David Angell, conductor

2.45 pm, Sunday 4 June 2017
St. Stephen's Church, Newtown
Tickets $35, concessions $25

The next Bourbaki Ensemble programme features two of the great string works of the early twentieth century. Vaughan Williams' *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* was inspired by English church music of the past, Bartók's *Divertimento* by Hungarian folk music. There will also be a miniature gem from the pen of Sibelius. We are delighted to welcome back Rachel Tolmie as cor anglais soloist in works by English and Australian composers, and we will give the premiere performance of *Con fuoco* for strings, brass and percussion by Sydney composer Kim d'Espiney.

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