THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

masterworks for strings

Vaughan Williams Tallis Fantasia

Bartók Divertimento

Sibelius Romance

Ridout Concertino

Percival Sicilienne

d'Espiney Con fuoco

Rachel Tolmie, cor anglais
David Angell, conductor

2.45 pm, Sunday 4 June 2017

St. Stephen's Church, Newtown

Welcome to the second Bourbaki concert for 2017! We begin with Vaughan Williams' magnificent *Tallis Fantasia* and proceed to Sibelius, whose music was much admired (and sometimes imitated) by English composers of the period. The connection continues in Alan Ridout's *Concertino*, whose final movement features hushed string chords and solo cor anglais in a way strongly reminiscent of Sibelius' *Swan of Tuonela*; and we move on to another cor anglais piece, Richard Percival's gentle and flowing *Sicilienne*. After interval we present two works influenced by national musical traditions: Arabic in the world premiere of Kim d'Espiney's *Con Fuoco*, and Hungarian in Bartók's spectacular and virtuosic *Divertimento*.

If you happen to be in the UK later this year, you can hear David conducting the Crendon Chamber Orchestra in Thame, near Oxford. The concert will take place on Saturday 28 October, the programme including David's string arrangement of the Debussy *Children's Corner Suite*, premiered by Bourbaki earlier this year, and works by Howells and Villa–Lobos.

We are saddened to report the passing away of a fine musician and loyal friend to many here, Derek Davies. A talented violinist and violist who performed in a wide variety of genres, and in ensembles ranging from his own group *Penguins* to full symphony orchestras, Derek was for a number of years a much valued member of the Bourbaki Ensemble and Orchestra 143, until ill health forced him to scale down his musical activities a couple of years ago. Derek was also a composer; we are glad to have had the opportunity of performing his work *India*, in which he himself undertook the solo viola part. On a personal level, Derek was a "larger than life" character and an incomparable social companion: none of those who knew him will ever forget him. We extend our deepest sympathy to Derek's wife Jill, and dedicate this concert to his memory.

PROGRAMME

Ralph Vaughan Williams Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis

Jean Sibelius Romance in C, Op. 42

Alan Ridout Concertino for Cor Anglais and Strings

I Plaint
II Canons
III Psalm

Rachel Tolmie, cor anglais

Richard Percival Sicilienne, for cor anglais and string orchestra

Rachel Tolmie, cor anglais

INTERVAL
20 minutes

Kim d'Espiney Con Fuoco

Béla Bartók Divertimento, for string orchestra

I Allegro non troppo
II Molto adagio
III Allegro assai

In the early years of the twentieth century, yet to make his mark as a composer, **Ralph Vaughan Williams** (1872–1958) was engaged in editing the *English Hymnal*. Besides writing some of the music himself, he keenly sought to include some of the great English musical heritage of earlier centuries. It was in this connection that he came across the tunes written by Thomas Tallis in 1567 for Matthew Parker's verse renderings of the Psalms. The third tune is composed in the Phrygian mode, of all early tonal systems the most distant from the major and minor keys; this feature must have strongly attracted Vaughan Williams, who was striving to depart from the well–worn paths of musical romanticism and to move in new directions.

The *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* was premiered at the Three Choirs Festival in 1910. It is scored for two string orchestras, the second in fact consisting of only nine players and placed at a distance from the first; in some passages four members of the first orchestra play as a string quartet, with first violin and viola having extensive solos. The variation of texture does much to establish the unique sonority of the *Fantasia*.

In the initial part of the work the whole ensemble largely plays as one, introducing and developing Tallis's theme. Subsequent sections exploit the contrast between solos, small orchestra and full orchestra; after a majestic climax the theme is given at length once more, by solo violin with a wonderfully rhapsodic solo viola counterpoint. A radiant G major chord concludes a composition which is, beyond dispute, one of the supreme creations of Western musical literature.

Though brief in duration and modest in instrumentation, the *Romance in C* by **Jean Sibelius** (1865–1957) is by no means a “small” work in its musical and emotional content. Its idiom is that of the composer’s second symphony and violin concerto, all three works dating from the years 1901–1905. (The attentive listener will find that the third bar of the *Romance* shares a short phrase with the opening solo of the concerto.) An intense and sonorous opening theme, punctuated by forceful chords, is succeeded by more yearning phrases in violins; the first theme returns in a grim and unharmonised two–part texture. A brief silence introduces a gentler episode, *pizzicato* cellos and basses supporting a chordal theme in the upper parts; soon, however, the music begins to regather tension, leading to a more fully scored reprise of the opening. The music follows its earlier course (with minor variations), gradually diminishing in dynamic until a final reminiscence of the main theme, deep in the cellos’ lowest register, leads into the concluding chords.

British composer **Alan Ridout** (1934–1996) was born on the outskirts of London and spent most of his life in south–eastern England, moving to northern France a few years before his death. He studied at the Guildhall School of Music and the RCM in London, and later won a scholarship to travel to Holland and work with the leading Dutch composer of the time, Henk Badings, whom Ridout later named as his most influential teacher. He wrote an immense quantity of music in all sorts of genres – church music, orchestral music and concertos, chamber music – and is particularly noted for his solo woodwind compositions. Many of Ridout’s concertinos require relatively small accompanying ensembles, frequently strings alone rather than full orchestra, making them widely accessible to performers. A taste for original thinking in the matter of accompaniment is exemplified by his three cello concertos: the first accompanied by strings and percussion, the second by voices and the third by an ensemble of eight cellos.

Ridout's *Concertino for Cor Anglais and Strings* (1979) is a deeply expressive composition which exploits to the full the characteristic colour of the solo instrument. The opening *Plaint* begins with an accompaniment of syncopated upper strings over a regular bass line, a texture which underlies much of the movement. Except for a couple of short cello phrases, the melodic interest is given entirely to the soloist. The second movement, *Canons*, delivers exactly what the title promises: a canon (effectively much the same as a round) is a musical form in which different parts enter successively with exactly the same theme. There is a two–part canon between cor anglais between cor anglais and strings at a crotchet's distance; then a three–part canon in which first violins are followed by violas and then by the soloist; the conclusion of the movement is spectacularly abrupt. The finale, *Psalm*, consists of a free, almost improvisatory solo set above hushed string chords which bring to mind Sibelius' *Swan of Tuonela*.

The *Sicilienne* by **Richard Percival** (born 1953) brings together two of the most beautiful and expressive colours on the orchestral palette – the string orchestra and the cor anglais. While retaining the stately character of the Baroque dance, more modern harmonic and formal influences add a new dimension to the form. While not a virtuosic work there is plenty of opportunity for the soloist to shine and for the combination of instruments to produce something of great tranquillity and beauty.

Richard Percival was born in Nelson, New Zealand. He attended Canterbury University and the Sydney Conservatorium of Music and studied in the United States with Victor Morosco and Abbe Frazer. He has been a professional woodwind doubler in a wide range of musical genres for over forty years, a teacher and a composer of music predominantly for wind players.

Programme note kindly supplied by the composer.

Kim d'Espiney developed an interest in music, which quickly turned into a passion, when she first had the opportunity to learn the saxophone at Newtown High School of the Performing Arts. She worked with some inspiring teachers and conductors along the way throughout high school and during her time at Sydney Conservatorium of Music. While at the Conservatorium, Kim also took up the oboe and clarinet and arranged music for different combinations of instruments. She has recently turned her hand to writing music – *Con Fuoco* is her second composition for orchestra. Her first piece, *Danza Arabica*, was premiered in 2016 by Mosman Symphony Orchestra, under the baton of Andrew Del Riccio.

Kim also has a passion for teaching. She has a wealth of experience teaching woodwind instruments to students of all ages, including directing and running music programs and festivals in Coonabarabran and surrounding rural areas, as part of the Sydney Conservatorium Music Outreach Program. Today, she combines her love of music and teaching working as a primary school teacher, composing music and playing oboe in various orchestras (most recently Mosman Symphony Orchestra and Balmain Sinfonia)... and she also enjoys singing *a capella* gospel music.

Con Fuoco is written for string orchestra and features percussion (djembe), alto saxophone, trumpet, French horn and trombone. The piece is written in three distinct sections: the first and third sections showcase haunting Arabic–influenced melodies and driving rhythms, while the middle section, the eye of the storm, highlights the beauty and versatility of the string orchestra: at times performing lush, lyrical melodic and harmonic lines and at other times providing delicate and sensitive accompaniment. The interplay between the saxophone and brass adds interesting colours and textures and demonstrates the flexibility of the saxophone as an instrument that works well in company with either the woodwind or brass family. The djembes have a strong presence throughout – they are the backbone of the entire piece, providing a solid rhythmic foundation to the music.

Kim is delighted that the Bourbaki Ensemble are giving the world premiere of her new piece. She would like to take this opportunity to thank the conductor David Angell, the Bourbaki Ensemble and guest players for their enthusiasm, support, time, efforts and talents in helping bring *Con Fuoco* to life.

Programme note kindly supplied by the composer.

The great Hungarian composer **Béla Bartók** (1881–1945) wrote the *Divertimento* for string orchestra in August 1939 at the chalet in Saanen (central Switzerland) which had been put at his disposal by the conductor Paul Sacher. It was the third work commissioned from Bartók by Sacher for his Basel Chamber Orchestra, following the *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celeste* of 1936 and the *Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion* of 1937. Sacher had asked Bartók for a piece light and simple in character, and relatively easy for the performers: generations of string players have found reason to doubt that he achieved the latter, and Bartók himself, writing to his wife during work on the *Divertimento*, in effect described the three–movement piece as light in mood, except for the first two movements!

But light or not, easy or not, the fruit of Bartók's summer in Saanen is without doubt one of the great works of the string repertoire. The first movement begins with a freely phrased dance tune which appears to take all possible pains to avoid synchronisation with its gently stamping accompaniment. Most of the movement is built from variants of this theme – literal repetition is exceedingly rare in Bartók – and from a *fortissimo* rhythm on one note, first announced by unison violins, violas and cellos about ninety seconds into the piece. The succeeding *molto adagio* is, if not tragic or despondent, certainly sombre in the narrow intervals of its opening; it rises to a terrifying climax about halfway through, with chains of violin trills set above relentlessly advancing quavers in the other parts. A tenuous and ghostly reprise of the opening heralds the final part of the movement. After a brief introduction, the finale introduces for the first time in the *Divertimento* an extended episode of diatonic music, a lively dance tune being skilfully and attractively alternated between solo players and the full ensemble. Subsequent episodes include a *fugato* commencing with unison strings, a brief violin cadenza and a *pizzicato* parody of the main theme before the work reaches its whirlwind conclusion.

The energy and vivacity of the *Divertimento*, at any rate in its outer movements, are a remarkable outcome of a period which for Bartók, as for so many others, had become difficult and threatening. He had cut his ties with Universal Edition of Vienna in protest at the "Aryanisation" of the publishing house (the Nazi euphemism for the removal of Jews from positions of influence), and the new work was sent to Boosey and Hawkes in London. A year or so later Bartók had departed for America in a self–imposed exile from which he was never to return.

Rachel Tolmie, cor anglais

Rachel started playing the oboe at ten years of age and the cor anglais at twelve. While at school she played in the Sydney Youth Orchestra; during her undergraduate years at the Sydney Conservatorium, and for many years afterwards, she was the principal oboist of the East–West Philharmonic Orchestra.

After completing with distinction a Postgraduate Diploma at the Royal College of Music, London, specialising in solo and chamber music performance, Rachel returned to Sydney and started recording her first CD with the brilliant pianist John Martin. John and Rachel continue to perform regularly together and have released further recordings on CD, Itunes and CD Baby. In 2006, Rachel's book *An Introduction to the Cor Anglais and Oboe* was published by Wirripang Publications.

In 2008, Rachel recorded a solo album with the Bourbaki Ensemble, conducted by David Angell. In 2011 her latest CD, *Bushfire*, with the Concertante Ensemble was released. She has appeared as soloist with many orchestras and ensembles including the Central Coast Symphony Orchestra, Concertante Ensemble, the Bourbaki Ensemble and the Balmain Sinfonia.

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 chamber 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. Bourbaki performances have featured many of the string works of Peter Sculthorpe, as well as pieces by composers ranging (alphabetically) from Betty Beath and Anne Boyd to Christopher Willcock and Richard Willgoss. We are particularly delighted to have commissioned *Lines at Infinity* by Chris Williams, premiered last December, and to have given first performances of works by Kim d'Espiney (the present concert), Colin Spiers, Greg van der Struik and others.

Violins Emlyn Lewis–Jones, Paul Pokorny, Joanna Buggy, Ian Colley, Stephanie Fulton, Paul Hoskinson, Camille Hanrahan–Tan, Madeleina Hanrahan–Tan, Ie–Wen Kwee, Deborah McGowan, Jenny Mee, Warwick Pulley, Victor Wu.

Violas Kathryn Ramsay, Robyn Botha, Liz D'Olier, Marilyn McLeod, Monique Mezzatesta.

Violoncellos Margaret Lindsay, Ian Macourt, Nicole McVicar, Shelayne Torta, Catherine Willis.

Basses Sasha Cotis, Cosimo Gunaratna, Daniel Murphy.

Saxophone Kim d'Espiney.

Horn Rafael Salgado.

Trumpet Andrew Del Riccio.

Trombone Merrilyn Vardouniotis.

Percussion Pawel Lewandowski, Kane Wheatley.

Charles Denis Sauter Bourbaki (1816–1897) was a prominent figure in nineteenth century French military circles. In 1889 he was in Leipzig and made the acquaintance of the young Jean Sibelius. A letter to a Parisian colleague is said to have contained the prophetic words, "the Finnish boy's chamber music [Sibelius had recently completed a piano quintet in G minor] is all very good, but how I wish that he would write a symphony". Regrettably, this correspondence has been lost, and it is no longer possible to verify its authenticity.

SIBELIUS – A REVIEW

The score and parts of the Sibelius *Romance* used in this concert were purchased online. The suppliers, as is common with internet retailers nowadays, invite customers to review the products they have acquired. We present anonymously, verbatim and without comment a review of the *Romance*.

> *I was reluctant on buying a piece by the rare and ecentric composer Jean Sibelius. I was looking for a fairly difficult piece that was beautiful, and a contrast from a fast piece by Bach that my High School orchestra was playing. I had never heard of this piece, but...*
>
> *it was in C so I got it. My students loved it, and I am proud to say we won our competition. The only reason I wrote this review is because I believe our win is because of the Finnish composer. Please, if you want a lovely piece, get this one. Sibelius is quite a good composer and this piece reflects that. ENJOY!*