THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

war and peace: music for strings

Pēteris Vasks Stimmen (“Voices”)

Carl St. Jacques Elemental Prayer Suite

Betty Beath Lament for Victims of War

Arvo Pärt Da pacem Domine

Carl St. Jacques, viola

Ristretto Chamber Choir

David Angell, conductor

2.45 pm, Sunday 5 August 2018

St. Stephen’s Church, Newtown

Welcome to the Bourbaki Ensemble's second concert for 2018! Our programme of "war and peace" presents music which commemorates victims of war and terrorism, music which yearns for peace and music which prays for the cessation of all war. We are delighted to welcome our guest performers for this concert. Violist and composer Carl St. Jacques will present his own *Elemental Prayer Suite* in a new version for viola and string orchestra, while the Ristretto Chamber Choir will join us in Arvo Pärt's moving *Da pacem Domine*. We had the great pleasure of collaborating with Ristretto two weeks ago in their concert *Coronation Interrupted*, centred on the Handel *Coronation Anthems*, and hope to continue the partnership in future years.

There will be one further Bourbaki concert this year, to take place on Sunday 4 November. Entitled "recomposed", the programme will consist of music which is in some way based upon, or which somehow references, other pieces by the same composer or another. In the Bourbaki tradition, a selection of music you (probably) haven't heard before. For further details please see the back of this programme. If you are not yet on our mailing list and would like to be – it's by far the best way to keep up to date with Bourbaki activities – please enter your email address on the form at the door, or send details to `david@bourbakiensemble.org`.

The present concert is the forty–third we have given at St. Stephen's church in the course of eighteen years. We are sure that audiences will agree with us in appreciating the inspiring and historically engaging surroundings – a wander round the churchyard after the concert is strongly recommended – as well as the marvellous acoustics of the church which make this such a wonderful venue for small ensemble concerts, and we would like to record our gratitude to all associated with St. Stephen's for allowing us to perform here.

PROGRAMME

Betty Beath Lament for Victims of War

Carl St. Jacques Elemental Prayer Suite for solo viola and string orchestra

I Earth
II Water
III Fire
IV Air
V Ether

Carl St. Jacques, viola

INTERVAL
20 minutes

Pēteris Vasks Symphony for strings *Stimmen* (“Voices”)

I Voices of Silence
II Voices of Life
III Voice of Conscience

Arvo Pärt Da pacem Domine, for chorus and string orchestra

Betty Beath was born in Bundaberg in 1932. Musical studies began with piano lessons before she had even reached her third birthday, and Betty learned to read music before she could read words. She undertook tertiary studies in Sydney and Queensland, and now makes her home in Brisbane, where she has taught at the Queensland Conservatorium and St. Margaret's Girls' School. Betty has a longstanding interest in the music and cultures of Asia and the Pacific region, and has spent time travelling and living in Bali, Java and Papua New Guinea.

The *Lament for Victims of War*, formerly entitled *Lament for Kosovo*, is one of Betty Beath's most popular works, and has received many performances both in Australia and overseas. In a note to the score, the composer describes the origin of the work in 1999 as a commissioned piece for mandolin ensemble.

> At the time of writing I was concerned with the fragility and decline of my mother and, day by day, the events unfolding in Kosovo brought feelings of deep sadness and anger. Although I intended the mandolin piece to be a joyful experience for performers and audience the feelings that were uppermost in my heart and mind emerged in the work.

After completing the mandolin version of her work, as well as a piano arrangement, Betty realised that it "needed the warmth and voice of strings" to fully express her intention. The revised and extended *Lament* became a commemoration not only of Kosovo but of the East Timor conflict. In a communication to the present writer she said, "It is so sad to reflect on current world events. *Lament for Kosovo* could well be a lament for so much else".

The work begins with a mildly dissonant tolling, as of funeral bells, in alternation with a mournful theme which is often stated in two parallel lines. There is a furious figure which tumbles down from the highest register of violins and violas, and a central section, slightly faster, which suggests the remorseless clamour of military activity. This dissolves into a sorrowful passage which eventually comes to rest quietly on a chord of A major. From a brief silence there emerge once again the bells, beginning quietly and growing in strength, losing every shred of dissonance as in the end they proclaim peace rather than war.

Extracts from the preface to the score quoted by kind permission of the composer.

The *Elemental Prayer Suite* was composed by violist **Carl St. Jacques** in Sydney in November 2016. Originally written for solo viola, eight months later the suite was expanded to include a string orchestra. Inspired by Sufi meditations on the five elements of creation – Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Ether – the Suite's movements reflect the natural and human journey of Life. Each element uses the viola as the principal voice, with harmonies and melodies that invoke deep contemplation and connection.

The *Elemental Prayer Suite for Solo Viola* premiered at the Mosman Art Gallery in September 2017, to a heartfelt standing ovation. Bourbaki's concert in Newtown, August 2018, will be the world premiere of the *Elemental Prayer Suite for String Orchestra*.

Programme note courtesy of the composer.

The symphony for strings *Stimmen* ("Voices") by **Pēteris Vasks** is a product of turbulent times. It was begun in December 1990 as the Latvian nation, occupied by the Soviet Union since the second world war, continued to struggle for independence. Fears of military intervention increased, fears which were realised in January 1991 as the Soviet OMON (militarised police units) mounted attacks on the barricades which pro–independence Latvians, largely civilians, had constructed in defence of government, communication facilities and other strategically important centres in the capital city of Riga. These events and their aftermath are depicted in Vasks' work.

In the first movement, *Voices of Silence*, the composer seeks to evoke (in his own words) "the infinity of a starry night". The work begins with the mysterious and unearthly sound of the lower strings playing *col legno*, that is, using the wood of the bow instead of the hair. After a silence the violins join in, the indeterminate pitches eventually crystallising onto a single note in the highest register of the orchestra. Textural *tremolo* passages alternate with "a string chorale of infinite stillness" (Vasks' words again), set over a *pizzicato* bass "heartbeat". As the third appearance of the chorale fades into silence, the second movement begins.

The first part of *Voices of Life* is intended as "a grandiose depiction of nature awakening", and is, perhaps, not far in spirit from the opening of Mahler's Symphony No. 1. An introductory section of trills and tremolos leads into a solemn chordal episode presaging the first of many elaborate "birdsong" passages, which eventually serve as accompaniment to a series of broad, singing melodies, reminiscent of folksong, on violas and celli. A return of the solemn episode plunges the music into a tumultuous section which, perhaps, depicts the days and nights on the barricades. Though no single melody is dominant, regular harmonic changes can be heard clearly. More birdsong, and an agitated section in which all the performers play independently of one another, are succeeded by an extended return of the tumultuous section, this time reaching a terrifying climax.

Voice of Conscience opens with a long passage of vibrant, expressive melody, mostly set against the simplest of accompaniments. Ultimately the music erupts into a cataclysmic section where, once again, each player acts as an individual. As Vasks wrote this passage, Latvia was still yet to achieve full independence: perhaps the composer wished to convey a sense of continuing difficulties and potential future disaster. And then the "chorale of infinite stillness" from *Voices of Silence* returns: Vasks has suggested that the listener may imagine that it has never stopped but has continued, unheard, throughout the upheavals of subsequent movements. Violas offer a quietly sorrowful yet consoling melody; the work hovers between consonance and dissonance; there is no resolution. The future remains uncertain.

Pēteris Vasks was born in Latvia in 1946. His family background as the son of a Baptist minister, and his continuing faith, led to the Soviet authorities denying him a place in higher education in his native land; he therefore studied at the Academy of Music and Theatre in neighbouring Lithuania. After graduation he worked for a decade as a double bass player in various Latvian and Lithuanian orchestras, before undertaking studies in composition, once again in Lithuania.

In recent years, Vasks has found champions among the musicians of the Baltic states and further afield. He has written two violin concertos *Distant Light* and *Lonely Angel*, both for Gidon Kremer, and many works for string orchestra. There are also concertos for viola and for cor anglais. His string quartets have been performed by the Kronos Quartet, his choral music by the Hilliard Ensemble and the Latvian Radio Choir. He has been composer–in–residence at festivals around the world, among them the 2012 Canberra Music Festival.

Da pacem Domine
in diebus nostris
quia non est alius
qui pugnet pro nobis
nisi tu Deus noster.

Give peace, O Lord,
in our time,
for there is no other
who will fight for us
except You, our God.

Born in Estonia in 1935, **Arvo Pärt** studied at the Tallinn Conservatory, graduating in 1963. For the remainder of the 1960s his compositions, often highly complex in texture and construction, received mixed responses, and in some cases were officially banned from performance. In the early seventies he virtually ceased to write music, emerging from his silence in 1976 with an utterly transformed musical aesthetic. The composer refers to this new style as "tintinnabulation" – literally, a tinkling of bells – and explains it as the construction of musical works from "very few elements... one voice, two voices... primitive materials".

Pärt's *Da pacem Domine* is an exemplar of its composer's musical concerns. A setting of a sixth– or seventh–century Latin hymn text for four–part choir with or without the accompaniment of string orchestra, its rhythmic and thematic content is restricted to a bare minimum. Only a couple of brief melodic efflorescences, led by the altos and second violins, interrupt the uniformly poised and meditative atmosphere.

The work was written in 2004 in memory of the victims of the Madrid train bombings in March of that year; since then, annual commemorative performances of the work have been given in Spain. At the conclusion of a recent performance of the Monteverdi *Vespro della Beata Vergine* by the Capella Reial de Catalunya and Le Concert des Nations which happened to coincide (10 October 2017) with the Catalan parliament's declaration, and suspension, of independence from Spain, conductor Jordi Savall led the ensemble in *Da pacem Domine* as a plea for peace and cooperation between Catalonia and Spain.

Carl St. Jacques, viola

Carl St. Jacques is a passionate violist from Miami, Florida, who has performed in over twenty countries and most of the USA as an orchestral and chamber musician. As a student of Atar Arad while attending Indiana University, Carl worked regularly with regional orchestras including the Evansville Philharmonic, Owensboro Symphony, and Orchestra Nashville, as well as major music festivals such as the Lake Lucerne Music Festival, Manchester Music Festival and the Miyazaki Festival in Japan. He is also a laureate in the internationally acclaimed Sphinx Competition (1999, 2002).

During the summers of 2002 to 2006, Carl was a member of the Verbier Music Festival in Switzerland, where he worked closely with maestros including Levine, Dutoit, Gergiev, Mazur, Dohnanyi, Rostropovich, and Tilson Thomas. In addition, he has worked with classical solo artists such as Kissin, Repin, Argerich, Maisky, Kremer, Harrell, Bashmet and Thiboudet, and popular music artists including Bobby McFerrin, Chick Corea, Amy Grant and Vince Gill. While residing in Miami, Carl held positions in the Miami Symphony, Florida Grand Opera, Miami City Ballet and Southwest Florida Symphony. He also appeared regularly with the *Voices of the People* chamber music series and toured as a member of the Sphinx Virtuosi.

Carl plays on a beautiful viola made by leading twentieth century German maker Paul Knorr, sponsored by a Sphinx MPower Artist grant in 2013. Now based in Australia, Carl continues to share his gifts as an artist, teacher and musician, performing and recording with some of Australia's premier artists and ensembles such as Kate Miller Heidke, Sarah Blasko, the Australian Chamber Orchestra and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. In Spring 2017, Carl added composer to his repertoire with the release of *The Elemental Prayer Suite for Solo Viola*.

Ristretto Chamber Choir

The Ristretto Chamber Choir are invited members of the Leichhardt Espresso Chorus, who enjoy a musical challenge and an extended repertoire. Under the artistic direction of Michelle Leonard OAM, Ristretto has performed Christmas carols at the Heritage and Houses Trust at Vaucluse House, for City of Sydney Council *Classics at Callan Park*, and with The Song Company in *Howls of the House* in Canberra and Sydney. Recent concerts include Rossini's *Petite Messe Solenelle*; in 2017 Ristretto combined with Melbourne choir Choristry, performing new Australian choral music in Sydney and Melbourne.

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. Other recent engagements include two programmes with the Woollahra Philharmonic (one in a replica pirate costume), and two concerts with the Crendon Chamber Orchestra (Thame, UK). A highlight was the Orchestra 143 Mozartathon, in which David conducted all the symphonies of Mozart in a series of five concerts spread over a single weekend.

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 in its 2018 season music by Australian composers Greg van der Struik, Graeme Koehne, Betty Beath, Carl St. Jacques and Peter Sculthorpe.

Charles Denis Sauter Bourbaki (1816–1897) was a prominent figure in the French military during the middle of the nineteenth century. After studying at the prestigious École spéciale militaire de Saint–Cyr he entered military service with the French forces in Africa, where he distinguished himself for his bravery under fire. In 1854 he was promoted to brigadier–general and was transferred to the Crimea. The three great battles of Alma, Inkerman and Sevastopol cemented Bourbaki's fame. Commanding the Armée de l'Est in the Franco–Prussian war, he was responsible for the counterattack which routed the Prussians at the battle of Villersexel in January 1871. Subsequently, however, the army, pursued by the enemy and weakened by the bitter winter, was forced to lay down its arms and submit to internment over the Swiss border. Édouard Castres' monumental 360° painting depicting the starving army may be seen at the Bourbaki Panorama Lucerne, `www.bourbakipanorama.ch`.

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

Violas Kathryn Ramsay, Dawid Botha, Robyn Botha, Marilyn McLeod, Monique Mezzatesta, Danny Morris.

Violoncellos John Napier, Ian Macourt, Nicole McVicar, Naomi Power, Shelayne Torta, Catherine Willis.

Basses Cosimo Gunaratna, Daniel Murphy.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

recomposed: music for strings

Max Richter The Four Seasons Recomposed
Peter Sculthorpe Night Song
Bryce Dessner Réponse Lutosławski

Warwick Pulley, violin
David Angell, conductor

2.45 pm, Sunday 4 November 2018
St. Stephen's Church, Newtown
Tickets $35, concessions $25

Max Richter's much performed work based on Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* is not an attempt at "modernising" that celebrated set of violin concertos, but rather a work which uses them as a springboard for Richter's own compositional inventiveness. Virtually all of *The Four Seasons*, however, can be heard clearly within the later work. Warwick Pulley has been a member of the Bourbaki Ensemble since its inception, and we look forward to his appearance in the solo role. *Night Song* for string orchestra by sadly missed Sydney composer Peter Sculthorpe is also a sort of "recomposition", being a version of part of Sculthorpe's 1970 work *Love 200* for singers, rock band and orchestra. New York composer and guitarist Bryce Dessner has written a string orchestra piece which is, as the title says, a "response" to the Polish composer Witold Lutosławski, specifically, to his *Musique Funèbre*, performed in Bourbaki's April concert this year.