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

Welcome to the final Bourbaki performance for 2018! Our theme of "Recomposed" is exemplified by Max Richter's recent version of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*. We are proud to present this new and vibrant reworking of what are probably the best loved concertos of the Baroque era, a (re)composition which has recently topped the itunes classical charts around the world. Also on the programme is the **Australian premiere** (and don't let anyone tell you otherwise) of *Réponse Lutosławski* by Bryce Dessner, guitarist from US art–rock band *The National*: the piece is a reaction to Witold Lutosławski's *Funeral Music* in memory of Béla Bartók, performed by Bourbaki in April this year. Of course, it just wouldn't be a Bourbaki concert without Australian music: Peter Sculthorpe's *Night Song* is also "recomposed", being a string orchestra version of an episode from his 1970 work *Love 200* for singer, rock band and orchestra.

As this programme was in production, the death was announced of leading Australian conductor and music educator Richard Gill. Although Richard never had any direct association with the Bourbaki Ensemble, many of us have played under his baton or studied with him, and have indelible memories of his personality and his musicianship. *Vale* Richard.

Bourbaki concerts and dates for 2019 are still in the planning stage, but we confidently expect to present a newly written concerto for flute and strings by a well–known Sydney performer and composer. To hear more about this and all our programmes, the best thing you can do is to join our mailing list. Simply send your email address to `david@bourbakiensemble.org` and you'll receive details of our 2019 concerts as soon as they are available. For innovative programmes of music you (probably) haven't heard before, you can't do better than the Bourbaki Ensemble! We thank you for joining us at our 2018 performances, and look forward to seeing you again in 2019.

PROGRAMME

Peter Sculthorpe Night Song

Bryce Dessner Réponse Lutosławski

1. Resonance
2. Preludio
3. Des Traces
4. Warsaw Canon
5. Residue

INTERVAL

20 minutes

Max Richter The Four Seasons Recomposed

I Spring
II Summer
III Autumn
IV Winter

Warwick Pulley, violin

Collaborations between rock bands and symphony orchestras frequently focus on giving pre–existing rock music a "classical" veneer (with, according to a cynical point of view, the dual aims of earning artistic credibility for the band and accumulating money for the orchestra). Compositions which are actually planned for band and orchestra, and which aim to provide idiomatic music for each, are much rarer, and probably the only significant Australian example is *Love 200* by **Peter Sculthorpe** (1929–2014). Commissioned by the ABC for the 1970 Sydney Promenade concerts, the work was premiered by singer Jeannie Lewis, prog rock band Tully (the core of the instrumental ensemble for the first Australian production of the rock musical *Hair*), the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and conductor John Hopkins. The work has rarely been revived, the publisher's website listing only two subsequent performances in 1971 and one in 1992, but the composer seems to have retained a good deal of affection for it and has arranged the central section, *The Stars Turn*, as an independent song with piano accompaniment, and also as a piece for string orchestra.

Two principal melodic ideas form the basis for *Night Song*. The "Stars Turn" motif is heard initially in the first violins about a minute from the beginning of the work. A pentatonic (five–tone) theme, it might almost sound like a synthetic folksong, were it not for the large melodic intervals near the start and the mildly dissonant harmonies. The song is repeated, again in the first violins, and later appears in the seconds beneath a swaying countertheme. The start of the movement features an expressive viola theme composed of tritones and semitones, supported by considerably more complex harmonies. These generally consist of a superposition of chords which are consonant in themselves but unrelated to each other, though the composer has allocated the notes in such a way that the resulting dissonance is poignant rather than harsh. The introductory theme recurs towards the conclusion of the work, though the very end is dominated by the first three notes of *The Stars Turn*.

Peter Sculthorpe was born and brought up in northern Tasmania. In his memoirs, he recalls writing music of his own for his first music lesson, only to be rebuked by his teacher for having wasted his time on this instead of practising piano. Fortunately, this experience did not put him off either piano or composition, and after finishing school he commenced study at the Melbourne Conservatorium. Further study at Oxford University was interrupted by the serious illness of his father, which compelled Peter to abandon his studies and return to Australia. One of his first works to achieve acclaim, *Irkanda IV* for violin, strings and percussion, was written in 1961 in memory of Joshua Sculthorpe.

As the sixties progressed, Sculthorpe found himself developing what has since been appraised as a distictively Australian voice. The *Sun Music* series, with its long horizontal lines, has frequently been viewed as an aural analogue of the flatness of much of the Australian continent. Nevertheless, Peter was always strongly conscious of Australia's location in the world, and an interest in Asian music often inspired his compositions. Perhaps contradictorily, he wrote many works for the quintessentially European ensemble of the string quartet, which he regarded as one of the great achievements of European art. Peter died in 2014, but his music continues to be extensively performed both in Australia and overseas.

Has combining rock and classical ensembles proved to be something of a dead end? If so, the fact has certainly not dissuaded composer/performers from having a foot in each camp.

New Yorker Nico Muhly, generally categorised as a "classical" composer, has collaborated with Björk and other pop artists, while rock performers such as Jonny Greenwood (Radiohead, UK) and **Bryce Dessner** (The National, USA) have both composed for the concert hall. Born in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1976 and now resident in Paris, Dessner has fulfilled commissions for orchestras including the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the New York Philharmonic, and for acclaimed chamber groups including the Kronos Quartet, Ensemble Intercontemporain and Eighth Blackbird.

Réponse Lutosławski is a twenty–minute piece for string ensemble. Each of its five enigmatically titled movements was inspired "either directly or indirectly" (Dessner's own words) by Polish composer Witold Lutosławski's *Musique Funèbre* in memory of Bartók. The opening *Resonance* begins with the haunting timbre of cellos playing quietly *col legno* (with the wood of the bow). Other instruments contribute *glissando* and *tremolo* effects to the eerie texture, and while after some time a certain solidification of atmosphere does supervene, the end of the movement remains shadowy and ill–defined.

Violas introduce the *Preludio* with a quiet and rhythmically neutral line which is soon taken up by cellos and eventually by the whole orchestra. Loud and metrically disruptive *pizzicati* threaten to derail the movement before the music dissolves into a shimmering harmonic stasis. The third movement, *Des Traces*, develops gradually from an opening of violin quavers, regular and somewhat mechanical, into vigorous and wide–ranging semiquaver passages. Beginning in the uppermost of four separate violin parts over a *col legno* accompaniment, the semiquavers soon spread to the rest of the violins before being transferred to cellos. They abruptly cut out to reveal a series of high, quiet chords linking this movement directly to the next.

Dynamically subdued throughout, the *Warsaw Canon* announces its theme in cellos, followed by violas, second violins, firsts and basses, the asynchronous lines only coalescing at the start of the final movement. Astringent yet intensely quiet harmonies are underpinned by an insistent bass *pizzicato*, until with a final canon high in the violins, the work fades into silence.

Max Richter was born in 1966 in Germany, brought up and educated in the UK. He studied at the Royal Academy of Music, London, and in Florence with the eminent modernist Luciano Berio. He was a founding member of the sextet *Piano Circus*, noted for its performances of Steve Reich, Terry Riley and other minimalist composers. Describing his style as "post–classical", Richter has written extensively for film and TV, and has released a number of albums on which he appears in the dual role of performer and composer. Major works include the three–act ballet *Woolf Works*, based on novels, letters and diary entries of Virginia Woolf, and the eight–hour *Sleep*, designed to accompany a night's slumber.

The Four Seasons Recomposed is one of a series of commissions by Deutsche Grammophon in which modern composers revisit well-known classics. It has the same twelve–movement structure as Vivaldi's score; Richter's adaptations range from the development of a single motif, sometimes quite negligible in the original, to the literal quotation of a whole movement – in other words, no adaptation at all! *Spring I* is a good example of the former: Vivaldi's *ritornello* opening is discarded, and Richter takes up the subsequent birdsong imitations, scoring them for nine solo violins instead of one. *Spring II* employs a solo violin line and an accompaniment figure familiar from Vivaldi, but with subtly altered shapes and harmonies. In *Spring*

III Richter takes a tiny fragment of the original solo line and sets it over a carefully–crafted seven–bar harmonic scheme.

The first fifty or so bars of *Summer I*, up until a forceful *tutti*, are essentially identical to the Vivaldi; but when Vivaldi returns to the slowish opening of the movement, Richter continues with the *tutti*, driving it relentlessly forward to an unexpected ending. The accompanying viola figure in *Summer II* is closely related to the Vivaldi, but only those listeners with a good knowledge of the original will realise how much the solo part has been altered. In *Summer III*, Richter plays around with the accentuation of Vivaldi's first four bars.

Richter's witty take on *Autumn I* is – almost – an accurate transcription of the Vivaldi. But notes are inserted here, excised there, until the performance sounds something like a defective CD constantly jumping tracks. *Autumn II* is, for a change, identical with the original, while *Autumn III* can only be described as hard–core minimalism.

Winter I begins with Vivaldi's celebrated evocation of precarious icy pathways; after lulling the listener into a false sense of familiarity, Richter continues by adjusting the two beats in each bar to one and three–quarter beats. The solo part in *Winter II* is pure Vivaldi, but the original *pizzicato* accompaniment is replaced by quiet cluster harmonies in the highest register of violins, violas and cellos. In the concluding *Winter III* Richter returns to minimalism, a lengthy section of looping interwoven scales preceding the first solo entry. Ultimately the work diminishes to hushed chords and the barely audible pulsation of the solo violin – and then – nothing.

In his review of the recorded version of Richter's *Four Seasons*, Ivan Hewett (Daily Telegraph, UK) concluded that "after years of tedious disco and trance versions of Mozart, the field of the classical remix has finally become interesting".

Warwick Pulley, violin

Warwick was born in 1970 into a musical family, and grew up in Armidale where he learned violin, piano and bassoon. His early violin lessons were with his father Laurence Pulley, where Warwick was one of the first Suzuki students in Australia. His most recent teachers have been Margaret Connolly and Goetz Richter.

In 1988 Warwick was a winner of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra School Composers competition with a string work, *Delta–H*. It was performed by the SSO in 1989 in a series of concerts in the Sydney Town Hall, was recorded in 1993, and appeared in a Bourbaki concert in 2003.

He is a keen chamber and orchestral musician and has led numerous groups including the Bourbaki Ensemble (founding leader), the Kurraba Quartet, the National Chamber Opera and the University of New South Wales Orchestra. He also played in the Sydney and Australian Youth Orchestras.

Warwick studied at the University of New South Wales where he gained an Honours degree in Computer Engineering and a Master of Mathematics. He is a professional software engineer and has worked in the defence, medical and banking industries.

As a keen puzzle collector, he appeared on ABC television and Macquarie Radio in 2009, and started a puzzle compeny, Smarter Puzzles, in 2010.

He would like to dedicate his performance to his late brother Richard, who regularly performed in Sydney as a violin soloist.

David Angell, conductor

photo: Steve Dimitriadis, www.mestevie.com

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 one with the Eastern Sydney Chamber Orchestra. A highlight was the Orchestra 143 Mozartathon, in which he conducted all the symphonies of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in a series of five concerts spread over a single weekend. David has also directed two concerts with the Crendon Chamber Orchestra (Thame, UK), presenting programmes featuring works by Mahler, Vaughan Williams and Australian composers. He has studied conducting with Richard Gill.

David is actively involved in arranging music for strings. His orchestration of Debussy's *Children's Corner* suite has been performed in Australia and the UK; he has (with the composer's permission) adapted Andrew Ford's *Oma Kodu*, originally composed for clarinet and string quartet, as a work for clarinet and string orchestra. He is the editor of a revised score of the *Concerto for Strings* by Margaret Sutherland, and has contributed translations of Russian and Italian poetry to the *Lied and Art Song Texts* website. Future projects include arranging Marc–Antoine Charpentier's *Noëls* for (modern) string orchestra.

Charles Denis Sauter Bourbaki (1816–1897), a prominent figure in the French military during the middle of the nineteenth century, was also well known and deeply respected on account of his close engagement with the arts and sciences. Recently discovered archives reveal how Bourbaki's technological and musical talents combined in the design and construction of a plucked–string instrument which appears virtually identical with the ukulele, an instrument hitherto dated no further back than the early twentieth century.

Undeterred by the failure in the 1830s of the *Trio Bourbaki* (Bourbaki, violin; Berlioz, flageolet/guitar; Jullien, ophicleide), Bourbaki took leave of absence from the army and assiduously set about mastering the technique of the instrument and exploring the full range of its expressive possibilities. This task may well have taken him a week or more, but at last he felt ready to appear in public.

Oral tradition suggests that Bourbaki quickly achieved renown as a performer on his new instrument. The critics, however, were evidently less than impressed, so much so that not a single announcement or review of his performances has come to light in the musical press of the day. Distressed by the disdain shown to his cherished invention, and by the influential Parisian writer Héléne Garnier's dismissal of the instrument as *une échappatoire pour les paresseux et sans talent*, Bourbaki cancelled all his planned recitals, destroyed his instruments, burnt the designs and returned to his military career. No more was heard of the ukulele until it was patented in Hawaii in 1917.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

The Bourbaki Ensemble made its debut in February 2001 with a programme of Sculthorpe, Debussy, Mahler and Dvořák, and since then has attracted acclaim for its imaginative programming and its support of Australian composers. Bourbaki is strongly committed to performing music of the twentieth and twenty–first centuries, and has presented world premieres of at least a dozen pieces, some specifically written for the Ensemble.

Bourbaki has recorded a CD, *Mozart in Love*, with soloists including Rachel Tolmie (oboe/cor anglais), and has also made contributions to two other discs, *Mermaids* (music by John Wayne Dixon) and *Into His Countenance* (Phillip Wilcher). All three can be purchased online from *Publications by Wirripang*.

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

Violas Marilyn McLeod, Ian Colley, Julia Pokorny, Kathryn Ramsay.

Violoncellos Naomi Power, Clara Blazer, Margaret Lazanas, Ian Macourt, Nicole McVicar, Catherine Willis.

Basses Cosimo Gunaratna, Sasha Cotis, Daniel Murphy.

Keyboard Bianca Zatz.